A Lavender Rose Means Love at First Sight
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Characters:
Sonic the Hedgehog, Shadow the Hedgehog, Miles "Tails" Prower, Amy Rose (Sonic the Hedgehog), Knuckles the Echidna, Vanilla the Rabbit, Cream the Rabbit, Big the Cat, Dr. Eggman | Dr. Robotnik, Orbot (Sonic the Hedgehog), Cubot (Sonic the Hedgehog), Rouge the Bat, Super Sonic

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A Lavender Rose Means Love at First Sight

by TheAviarySystemWrites

Summary

Sonic wakes up one morning to find out he's no longer his SEGA iconic blue, but cherry blossom pink, and flowers grow and follow him everywhere he goes. He enlists the help of his friends to deal with this new development, including Shadow, who ends up only being more enamoured with this new side of him as time goes on.

Short slice of life ficlets based on the fanart trend of "Sakura Sonic".

Peonies

Smelling the fresh newly birthed scent of cherrywood in the air, Sonic awoke, the dawn's light brushing against his skin. In the same shade of a sakura blossom, the sky greeted him with the rosy red sun, his quills and eyes graced with a welcoming light. As he brushed his fingertips onto the glassy silk touch of his bedsheets he could see a dazzle of white magnolia petals gathering onto flesh. Thinking of it as nothing but a hypnogogic hallucination, he blinked, and went on with the rest of his morning.

Every step of his feet brought upon birth to the Earth. Forget-Me-Nots and white roses crawled onto his legs and his thighs, but it hasn't even been five minutes since he opened his eyes. Maybe a cup of coffee would make them go away. Maybe a bowl of bland cereal. His fingertips brushed against the sides of his walls, veins of vines erupting like cracks of light in a silhouette. Maybe if he went to the bathroom and washed his face. Maybe if he took a long draught of water. Like a flower himself these were the things he needed in order to fully dance in the sunlight.

His incisors as he brushed his teeth were intact, and his body was a mess of pink quills as always whenever he…

Pink.

Pink like lotus flowers. Pink like orchids. As his fingertips once again slid over the side of his face he could feel an eruption of colour, his pink quills and yet another sprout of white roses being birthed from his touch. He shook his head. Of course not, this was still just a surreal dream. He filled his glass of water for only a mass of lichens and moss to grow from the bottom of the cup. Violets grew from that, again with his miraculous fingers. Soft pastel petals of sakura flowers dripped from his quills and onto the white linoleum. Everywhere he walked it was a celebration and a renewal. Were his eyes deceiving him? Did he just wake up on yet another spring morning, pink as a cherry blossom, with twigs and bursts of colour bleeding and blending into him like deer antlers, and everything he touched was suddenly smitten by flowers and grass?

He took another step into the hallway, a row of sprouting tulips awakening, as pink and yellow as the sky. He took more steps downstairs to see that the steps were overrun with yet more moss and white dahlia's. Upon entering Tails' workshop the metal and sawdust were overgrown with daisies and carnations, wiping away every evidence of that Tails had tinkered with anything that wasn't natural. Stepping into the doorway, poppies and gardenia's tracing to where Tails sat working on his latest gadget Sonic was insure of what do think or say about this sudden new development. He swore that he's never experienced this, at least, until Tails' gun was absorbed by a slew of peonies that filled and broke through the cracks.

"Tails, do I look...*pink* to you? At all? Or am I imagining things?"

It wasn't long after that Tails was kissed by the sunlight too, but his sharp eyes he knew weren't trying to trick him: Sonic was no longer his iconic cobalt blue that his friends, fans, and foes knew him by, but rather, a sweet pastel pink, giving him a slightly more feminine appearance. However, other than the sudden overgrowth that followed Sonic wherever he went, his eyes were still as green as the hills he was born in and his speed was still intact. Just every step his feet made, many flowers and plants were born in his wake. And like Sonic, this wasn't something that Tails had ever seen him as, or was even aware of that could happen to him. He rubbed his eyes momentarily, but he was still a newly born baby pink, a trace of oleanders rooting onto Tails' desk.

"Nope, I did several reality checks on myself and I see you as pink too. And now my invention was just made into a gardening tool." He attempted to brush away the peonies but only more just replaced the few that were scattered aside, still infesting his gun. Well, it was time to consult the blueprints on this one again. Nothing was going to get an invasive species of peonies out of this one.

"Do you...do you know what's going on with me at all? Why are flowers growing everywhere I touch? Why am I shedding petals? Why did I suddenly wake up and find out that I'm no longer *blue* but *pink?"*

“Calm down Sonic. I’m sure there’s a rational reason for all of this…”

Tails, however, said this all the time, even when things clearly weren’t rational. If anything, it felt like a magic spell was enchanted on the hedgehog. But he took a deep breath, thinking of anything logical that could explain this. However, the poor kit was only drawing up blanks.

“Did you do anything…*unusual* last night? Angered a god by chance? Or did Eggman…”

No, that wasn’t rational. Sonic still seemed as speedy and as reckless as ever. The only difference was his obvious strange colouration and the flowers that emerged everywhere he touched. This wasn’t Eggman’s way of doing things. They all knew flowers and nature wasn’t his style.

“No, I was just reading last night, ended up falling asleep, and then I…woke up like this! Come on Tails, you gotta help me! I don’t want everyone to see me as pink for the rest of my life!”

Tails couldn’t help but chuckle at that. “Hey, why not? Pink actually doesn’t look that bad on you.”

“Tails, *seriously!*”

“I was just joking!” Well, not really. Tails had to admit the pastel look didn’t at all seem too bad on him. In fact, it made him…a little bit cute. And if anything, maybe it would be a good ploy to get his enemies to drop down their guard around him, if nothing else was affected and Sonic could still fight like always. “Look, go ahead and give me a sample of your quills. It’ll take a while to determine what’s going on with your body right now, but getting an answer later is better than no answer at all. Other than the…’pigment’ of your quills and flowers growing wherever you touch, it seems like you’re OK otherwise. Can you eat? Can you drink a glass of water like usual?”

When Sonic took his pills with the mentioned glass of water, small lichen sprouts emerged on them, but otherwise, they were untouched, other than a strong plant like flavour being touched upon his tongue. However, Tails determined that Sonic would be fine, although everything from now on was probably going to taste like vegetables.

“Hey, on the bright side, it seems like you’re going to be eating a bit healthier.”
Though Sonic was always one with the chipper attitude and bright smile, he didn’t laugh again at Tails’ attempt at humour. It meant his

chili dogs were going to be garnished with ingredients he didn't ask for.

"It'll take a few hours before my DNA machine detects any abnormalities. For now, you might need to do something to distract yourself. Take a long run. See what everyone else is up to. If this is something that might be affecting you for a while, we might as well let everyone know about this as soon as we can. And Sonic?"

"Yeah?"

"Please don't touch any more of my tools until we figure out what's going on."

Tails' gun was rising with yet more blades of grass, a small sprout of possibly an oak tree growing on the hilt, and copious amounts of morning glories seeping onto the metal and concrete that surrounded them. It was as if mother nature was rebelling against everything Tails had built.

As soon as Sonic dashed off, Tails' mouth was foul, full of fury and indignation.

"Damn it."

Peppermint

Amy's cottage lied a few miles away from Tails' workshop, already adorned with a field of pink and yellow tulips. Knocking on the door, his fist made it covered with moss and hanging blue flowers, a new ornament for her to possibly appreciate later as Sonic sighed, ready to tell her the news of his sudden overnight change.

He was able to run swiftly enough for no one else other than Tails to notice his news bright colouration, not wanting the media to grab a hold of this story for them to chew and mull over on why their heroic hedgehog was looking this way. That, himself, he truly didn't know, and would most likely not know for a long time. As the breeze blew softly and caressed Sonic's pastel quills a few more petals shook and fell on Amy's doorstep, as if he was only bleeding nothing but flowers and nature in front of Amy. Opening the door to greet him, she was greeted herself with his unusual appearance, the blossoming tree branches growing further out to touch the wind and sun as if they were sentient and alive. Sonic told her to not say anything and to quickly let him in. There wasn't much of a story he could tell her anyways. Things were just somehow this way, and Tails couldn't at all find any logical reason on why this was happening, or at least, for right now.

"So you just woke up and suddenly you were...like this?"

Sonic nodded, yet another cascade of pink flowers flowing and cascading onto Amy's couch. She didn't seem to mind this all that much, thinking it was yet another pretty touch to her quaint cottage. Sonic being an even brighter pink than even her, however, was something that she found very hard to ignore.

Brewing a steaming mug of peppermint tea, Sonic's nostrils was always assuaged with the various scents and smells of herbs and baked goods whenever he entered Amy's residence. She always tried her best in making all of her friends feel welcomed, whether it was with her saccharine smells and appearance or with the promise of snickerdoodle cookies and blueberry muffins that emerged from her

stone oven. Amy's nose also caught a hint of cherry in the air as much as Sonic did when he awoke, driving her to a sense of calm despite this shocking development.

Midst Sonic's panic, she giggled. The new look on him, she had to admit, it was quite adorable. And she was thinking maybe she could bring him with her the next time she had to garden, as the tulips even grew in the hallways of her home. Upon touching the mug of peppermint tea yet more tulips sprouted from the handle and the rims of the cup, Sonic already creating a small colourful pond with Amy's tea. It was as if everywhere he went, he developed a living ecosystem.

"Yes Amy. I just woke up and noticed I was pink, and flowers are growing on everything I touch. Your teapot may as well be a garden in there now."

Well, this wasn't so bad, Amy thought. She could smell Sonic's fingers sprouting yet more peppermint for her to brew later for her friends. And peppermint already grew rapidly and quickly all around her. It was fine, she kept telling to herself. She could always use more of it.

"But you don't feel weird other than the stuff growing on your head, right? You can still eat and drink stuff. I see you're enjoying my tea even if I can't ever use that cup again."

"So you're just going to think this isn't a big deal like Tails? He made jokes about this too! Come on Ames, this isn't funny and y'know it!"

Well, that wasn't really true. It was a little bit humourous. Sonic held a lemon bar and vines emerged from the sugary dusted treat. Despite the added plants in his diet the bar still tasted quite good, and maybe even added a little bit more to the taste. It may have been yet another growth of mint adding to the tart flavour.

"No, of course I don't think it's funny. But maybe...I dunno, this won't be so bad if this is just something you're going to go through for a little bit. Maybe I can have you go out back and help me out with my garden!"

"*Ames, c'mon*!"

More petals shook off of Sonic's quills as his fists shook holding onto his teacup. How come his friends so far weren't taking this seriously? He could never be seen in public like this! What if Eggman wanted to take this form of his and use it against them? There were so many things that could go wrong with Sonic having plant life grow everywhere he touches, the public seeing that he was *pink* of all things, that *pink* didn't match his style, what if he would be *pink* for the rest of his life, what if the few clothes he had no longer matched because he was *pink*, and…

Amy scowled. She knew what it was like being pink, and it wasn't all that bad. In fact, she thought it looked quite good on Sonic (possibly even better than her).

"And so, what did Tails say to do?"

"He took one of my quills and is like doing some DNA analysis or whatever but he told me it might be a while so I needed to talk to everyone and distract myself…"

"Well, that's usually the first go-to whenever someone is dealing with something that upsets them. Maybe you can...I don't know, help me around here until Tails finds an answer on what to do about this? That'll probably calm you down a least a little, don't you think?"

Of course, she was just now asking him to do chores for her. But all he could think of at the moment was just to not think about his predicament. Maybe, at the end of the day, it wouldn't be a bad idea for him to help her. As Amy gathered a big bag of flour, butter, vanilla extract, eggs and sugar, she asked him if he wouldn't mind helping her bake some cherry bread.

As she kneaded the dough, she showed Sonic everything he needed to do. She knew Sonic wasn't exactly as skilled, but he wasn't going to learn by just simply not doing anything. Her counter tops had the corpses of egg shells and dripping yolks lying on the surface, complete with a scattering of snowfall of flower as Sonic often needed assistance in remembering the measurements and wasn't exactly the tidiest hedgehog around. His gloves were dusted and splattered with dough and petals from the branches of his head. As Sonic rolled and tossed the dough haphazardly chamomile and apple blossoms sprouted from his primordial ooze. For a moment, she could tell Sonic

felt like God, making a chaotic mess everywhere he went and ignoring the disasters that often followed him. Her rolling pin grew a wreath of strawberries by the time Sonic was finished abusing it. The eggs he cracked, too, bled with cilantro herbs growing in the slimy film he left behind. And the flour had flowers. Amy could swear that for a moment, it grew back to wheat and would remain that way until Amy would crush it with her strawberry pin. In Sonic's eyes, it was a natural disaster inside her kitchen, and possibly the worst cherry bread she could ever conceive in her wombly hearth.

But yet somehow, despite all this, Amy didn't mind, and kept talking to him.

"Sonic, what would you do if you were like this forever? You can't just hide and expect the problem to go away."

He expected everything to go away when he ran. Other than saving lives and helping others it was one of the things he liked about running. Things that troubled him was only a speck in his eye in a flash, as if the world was no longer real around him. Amy could only shake her head and sigh, knowing that this wasn't the type of conclusion Sonic would usually come to. No, even if he was a bright garish pink, he could still help his friends. He could still make a difference in many of their lives. This world of his needed colour, and while pink was indeed a strange colour, it was still eyecatching and useful all the same, and many would still love and appreciate him for it.

"These things usually never bothered you, Sonic. And it's not bothering me. You're still my friend whether you're blue, pink, purple, green, it doesn't matter! And I'm sure everyone else thinks that too!"

Sonic stared at the oven Amy specifically told him not to touch, his eyes glazed the surfaces that once were shiny but now showed every single sign that Sonic inhabited her kitchen, a pink tornado dirtying and desecrating one of Amy's favorite spots in her home.

But it was okay. Everything was OK, she kept telling him. He didn't

believe her, but she kept repeating to him as if a mantra, that everything would be OK and nothing would be a mess like this in their lives again.

“Have you told Shadow?”

Amy’s hand gently held his wrist, sprouts of coriander growing around the holes of her fist. She could feel Sonic quiver in her touch, alarmed at first as his pink quills were raised, then lowered as she stroked his back slowly. Sonic granted permission for her to touch him earlier, for he knew Amy often showed her affection through touch alone, but it was still something that would be difficult for him to be completely attuned to. He shook his head, saying that other than Tails she was the only other friend of his he told, and he wanted to get the shock and surprise from Knuckles done and over with before he would tell Shadow why he was noticeably upset.

“I know it’s scary, Sonic, but you can get through it. You always have and I know you always will.”

She cut a slice of the bread, decorated with cherry blossoms on top of the cherries that dotted its surface.

“Now, I bet you’re hungry after helping me out. Let’s eat!”

Sonic remembered that maybe he forgot to add another cup of sugar to the mix. And maybe he didn’t cut the cherries well enough. Maybe he also forgot to lightly grease the pan so the bread wouldn’t be burnt and stuck to the bottom.

“Even if you end up like this forever Sonic, I think Shadow will still love you, no matter what.”

But while it was different, the mixture was quite lumpy and she may have taken a bite of a misplaced petal and an eggshell here and there, Amy took a bite.

And she said it tasted fine.

Magnolias

It was hard getting your eyes adjusted to anything other than a green glassy surface everyday. It's what Knuckles did often. He had to stay on the island and make sure no one touched the Master Emerald, even if most of his days were spent staring in a green mirror. He couldn't recognize himself as he often gazed inside it, expecting some sort of answer for his woes. But it took his eyes an even longer time to adjust to the overgrowth of plants and palm trees that grew suddenly in the distance. He thought he was hallucinating again. There was only so much of the gem he could take to stare at before he began to see strange things.

Tiny Chaos gathered with every tree that sprouted, already harvesting a full batch of fruit for them to consume. It was ripe and rich in juices, and Knuckles would've been tempted to take some for himself, if he wasn't met with a pink sore sight.

A storm of sakura petals gathered near the steps of the temple, fallen like pink snow. He noticed long branches that stretched out like hands towards him as the hedgehog stepped closer to him, as if they were yearning for his touch. Again he wondered if staring at the emerald for too long was giving him visions. But as Sonic touched him, he could feel daffodils hanging from his fists, once used for violence and now only used for comfort as Sonic told him everything. He woke up, found out he was pink, and suddenly flowers grew everywhere he touched. They deduced that it wasn't Eggman's doing: the man was the symbol of industrialization and could never think of giving the hedgehog these strange powers.

The Chaos babbled and muttered softly to themselves as they observed a growing lilac near their pond, seeming more beautiful and as glassy as the Master Emerald itself. Sonic was careful to not touch them; after all, he didn't know what effects his ample touch would have on the creatures. But it was sad, he thought, that he couldn't give them affection like he always did when he visited Knuckles. They whined and tried to give him their fruit to appease him, but they didn't understand. And neither did he, for that matter.

“So let me get this straight: you just woke up this way, and now suddenly everything you touch just grows into a bunch of flowers?”

Sonic nodded. He couldn’t think of any other rational explanation, unlike Tails.

“But everything else is fine with you?”

“Yeah, but...Knuckles, I can’t go on the rest of my life like this and you know it! I can’t just touch food and be okay with eating it if it’s suddenly garnished with roses! Tails is trying to figure out exactly what this is, but…”

To Knuckles, things weren’t as bad as they seemed to be. The pink seemed to fit Sonic rather nicely, and if he was the fighting force for nature, then maybe this was what they all needed all along. The sun struck the glassy interior of the Emerald again and it glittered upon Sonic’s fur, the green light even unable to colour him different but a bright happy pink. He nearly needed to shield his eyes just from how bright and almost holylike he appeared within the sun’s gaze. If Knuckles stared at him any longer, he would go blind. So he didn’t, at least for a few minutes.

“So it’ll be some time before Tails finds a solution to all of this, is what you’re saying.”

Again, Sonic nodded.

“Have you told Shadow about this?”

“No, he’s...well, admittedly he’s going to be last on my list of everyone I tell. I just don’t know how he’s going to react to me...well, being like this.”

While he could understand Sonic’s concern of being a bright pink for the rest of his life, it was as if the hedgehog was treating himself as if he was a broken toy, no longer being able to be loved again by all those who played with him. It was a sad, sorry sight, Knuckles thought. Because clearly, he was still himself, still able to recognize who his friends were, and his friends were able to still recognize him. Despite his colouration, he was much the same. Broken as he appeared to be, he was lovable all the same, and it was something that Knuckles

wanted to tell him. Even in the unconventional ways he often did things.

And so they fought and sparred. Other than the onslaught of plants that Knuckles often had to brush away carelessly, Sonic's skills were much the same. If he wasn't so worried, he would still be his joking, jovial self. Sonic could still run and fly on the earth much like the wind, but only with a trail of flowers rapidly growing wherever he trekked. Despite this, this was all still much the same, and Knuckles couldn't help but laugh.

"Oh, not you too! Why is everyone just taking this so lightly?"

"Because if it happened to anyone else, you'd much be the same. And you would also tell me not to worry. It's what you've always done, and something I've always envied in you."

Knuckles was never one with secrecy when he was with Sonic. He felt many days he could tell him anything and nothing would matter. Even if Sonic was no longer as blue as the sea on the Earth. Some things changed, but sometimes, Knuckles thought, for the better.

As the petals continued to drip onto the ground, Sonic noted his head often itched, as if the sakura was nothing but glorified pink dandruff. Knuckles' fist held onto one and he held it aloft near the sun and the glistening Master Emerald, it sparkling like seaglass. Sonic scratched and rustled his quills some more, as if the branches that were firmly stuck inside him cried for the loss of normalcy. While Knuckles still kept his chuckles to a minimum, he smiled, and told him the world was still alive and spinning, as usual.

"I think Amy is right. I think you'll be OK, Sonic. Something tells me this is just...maybe a temporary thing you're going through. You'll be blue again someday."

But in Sonic's chaotic head, he couldn't think of any other days ahead of this one. He felt time stood still ever since he became this way. The Earth was no longer spinning and was in fact waiting for him to

breathe. But when would the hedgehog be ever comfortable in his own skin ever again? Weeks? Months? Even years? He couldn't imagine never eating chili dogs the same way again if he would be like this for the rest of his life.

"*But you always looked on the bright side of things. You taught me that. And now, I think you need to practice what you preach."*

They gazed at the clouds, the only thing not green in both of their visions. Because of Sonic's predicament he was only thinking of the clouds as cotton plants or fully grown dandelions, their tufts floating in the wind along with the pink pastiche. It was hard to see how bright the hedgehog was now, nearly a pearly white as the sun's rays stroked and comforted him. Sonic never saw the same things that Knuckles saw. And that was why he often needed him.

Sonic remembered when they both walked into a flower shop. Unbeknownst to him, Knuckles often liked to dabble in cooking and gardening when he wasn't busy with his guardian duties. He carried a plastic white crinkled bag full of leeks bigger than his fists, ready to be sliced and used for eggdrop soup. The echidna gazed at the flower magnolia trees that lined the streets, their pink petals greeting every footstep they made on the concrete. While usually quiet, Sonic was surprised to hear Knuckles speak, in reverence of the coming spring weather and the warm breeze that kissed their muzzles, the sun looking white and holy.

"Did you know flowers have their own language? That every plant means something? We give out roses for our loved ones because it's a declaration of love. You see poppies lining the graves of battlefields because it's to console and respect those who lost them. Red tulips are a sign of passion. I ended up learning that magnolias are a sign of nobility, and a love for nature. And I can see that." He picked up a petal again and glanced at it like it was some unknown treasure, shimmering like the blue stars of the night sky.

"Because when they burst in the spring, they definitely make me appreciate the world around me. They colour the branches. It's beautiful. I wished we could have them all year long, but then I guess we wouldn't appreciate them as much as we are right now."

Sonic nodded. It was his philosophy, after all, that nothing was truly forever, and it had to be appreciated for this moment, right now. And Knuckles affirmed to him that this, too, was something he taught him since they've been friends.

"It's like enjoying the trees in autumn, the gold and red that surrounds you. And the snowfall and ice that glitters in the winter. Like you, it's what makes the world keep moving."

"So...are magnolias your favorite flower, Knuckles?"

He wasn't sure where this question suddenly came from. He stood up, his eyes needing to adjust to yet more green and pink once again, tired of the blue. As he glanced at Sonic's pastel quills once again he could see his wrists were bound by several twigs of blossoming magnolias, as pink and scattered as the rest of him that were on the ground. They were just as beautiful as that day when the both of them walked on the candy-coated streets of the farmer's market, as bright and as white as the same sun that glowed and blinded Knuckles as they both walked home to prepare for Knuckles' cooking.

The next time Sonic would visit Knuckles out of the blue, he still saw those branches of the magnolia tree sitting in a tiny emerald vase on top of his table, gleaming and white as their smiles.

Blueberry

Knocking on Vanilla's door, he noticed a vine of blueberries caressing her doorknob. They reminded him that he once was as blue as them, and for a moment, his sadness leaked from his mind again. But maybe Vanilla could comfort him, like she always did.

He brushed away the tangles (admittedly gathering the few ripe blueberries that emerged and munching on them, making his pearly fangs turn purple) and was greeted with an adoring face. Cream smiled, and only thought of a playdate with him, even with his fur as pink as the dawned sun.

"How did you turn pink, Mr. Sonic?" She couldn't help but excitedly bounce around him like rabbits were usually wont to do, observing every pastel quill and petal that flowed from his head and onto their wooden floor. Sonic could only sigh and tell her what he told everyone else. Tails was looking for a rational explanation when there truly wasn't any, at least, from what he could gather.

"My mom isn't here right now Mr. Sonic. She went out and is gathering some berries for her pie she's baking soon. But if you want, we can still play until she comes back."

Even with his new appearance, Sonic often couldn't say no to Cream's pleas. As he sat on her plastic chair waiting for Cream to gather her pink plastic tea cups nearly as pink as him, a long trail of Forget-Me-Nots grew around him. All Cream could really think of at this moment was that they would be beautiful accessories for her flower crowns.

She gave Sonic one of her mother's bonnets to wear, along with a dress that was three sizes too big for him, but this wasn't the first time she's done such things with him. If he couldn't stop thinking about his predicament, he would've enjoyed these moments with her all the same, like he always enjoyed Vanilla making him a tall damp glass of sweet tea whenever he was becoming more acquainted with her plush

toys and the crayoned drawings that lined her walls. There were even a few that Sonic could still recognize himself in them. Cream looked up to him, like how he, sometimes too, looked up to her.

To be happy and cheerful and strong despite everything. Sometimes it was even a trait that Sonic himself believed he lacked.

With his pinky finger exposed, and along with the white daisies that Cream was now collecting, he drank her tea like she showed him how, and she even taught him the art of flower crown making, his fingers often going too fast to keep up with. But Cream could only smile and tell him that practice made perfect. Just like he would usually tell her.

A pile of crayons was lackadaisically rolled onto their table, Cream offering for him to forget about his pigment for a moment and just join her. Every crayon he picked up a flower that correlated with its colour grew with it. A fire truck red would sprout roses. A sunny yellow made his pictures burst with daffodils. And periwinkle made yet another string of Forget-Me-Nots line their papers. His hands shook, unable to grip onto the base of the crayons anymore. How could he go on with life like this, just having flowers interrupt everything he did with his friends?

“I think they’re beautiful, Mr. Sonic.”

Her fingers like a crochet needle hooked and linked together yet more daisies and dandelions from Sonic’s drawings. Like a crown of thorns she hung it on Sonic’s head, only for it to bleed yet more magnolia petals to softly fall into their drinks. From Cream witnessing his supposed suffering her laughter only grew lighter in tone, sparkling like the windchimes outside of Vanilla’s door. For a moment, the hedgehog too smiled back. Only for a brief shining moment. He still wasn’t sure how he would adjust with these developments. But seeing Cream happy with him, well, he couldn’t help but admit, it made him happy too.

The lemon yellow sun on his parchment grew a row of small sproutling yellow tulips. They seemed as bright as the sun that filtered through their windowpanes.

Vanilla and Cheese returned shortly after, her holding onto a bushel of blueberries as ripe as they once were on her door handle. As if Vanilla had seen it all, she was not deterred from Sonic's new appearance. She only said hello and asked no further questions.

"If you'd like Sonic, you can help me bake. I heard from Amy this morning that you were a great help to her in the kitchen. Maybe you can help me bake a pie for Cream to eat for dessert tonight."

Was Amy already gossiping to everyone about his recent change? He thought he told her to keep this a secret! For all he truly knew she may have already told Shadow! He held his head, the branches that were only stuck firmly inside making him itch and having yet more pink petals fall onto the floor. This didn't seem to bother her like it didn't bother Amy. It was yet more playthings for Cream to make for the both of them.

Keeping his flowercrown intact as he once again assisted one of his friends with yet more baking, Vanilla helping him with reminders of what he needed to do and for her to touch the things he felt he couldn't touch. There was no bleeding of yolks this time on the kitchen counter. She didn't mind helping Sonic with that.

Her spoons and mixers were only wrapped strongly with yet more bursts of blueberries. Sonic was wondering if there was a way he could control these newfound powers of his. Just thinking of a blueberry pie made him grow blueberries wherever he moved. Which was something that Vanilla couldn't help but appreciate greatly.

"I don't really see this as a bad thing Sonic. Maybe this is just a nice thing that will happen to you every once in a while."

“But...Vanilla, I look different. I fear people won’t recognize me anymore. And I don’t want people to forget me.”

Vanilla looked at him inquisitively, confused. He wasn’t sure what spurred this reaction of hers, but he finished. “...That’s all. I just...don’t want to feel lost.”

“You’re not lost, Sonic. If anything, you’ll find your way. You always do.”
Arising from his fingertips were yet more bushels of blueberries. Vanilla plucked them and added them to the pie filling. She told him he was probably making enough for him to make another one and to take one home, as a reminder.

“All I’m worried about is for you to lose yourself in your worry. But first thing you did when you came to my home, even when I wasn’t around, was to play with my daughter like you always have. And she seems to be very happy to see you today.”

He’s always played with her even when Vanilla was absent. He’s always coloured and played house with her. He never complained when Cream decided he got to be the baby and spoonfed him because he knew those small things always made her happy. He always put on the dresses. He always put his pinky finger up. He did these things because he knew Cream appreciated it. And it made both of them happy.

He could never be lost anyways. He had a trail of growing flowers to follow to run back to where it all started.

“You’re still Sonic. You’re still you.”

It was hard for him to believe at the moment, but upon tasting a bite of the blueberry pie she gifted him, it tasted sweet, succulent. Possibly the best pie he had in years. It was as sweet as the sky, as blue as the ocean. Blueberries grew on his fork and he simply lavished them with his tongue. They burst in indigo and tart.

His flowercrown remained on his head, showing no signs of wilting. Affixed firmly to the antler-like branches atop his quills he could go as fast as he wanted and they would never fly away. Like all of his other friends' keepsakes it became a part of him as his new appearance was slowly becoming mixed with his consciousness, Sonic knowing that he was still Sonic. Maybe not a deep cobalt, but still sweet, still tart, still round and innocuous, like all blueberries always were.

Lotus

Every year it snowed in April, but to Sonic, it started to rain, his branches rustling as he sped down in a zigzag through the woods, preparing himself to talk to Shadow. How would he feel, him no longer being himself? A facsimile of everything he once was? The diamond dust of the rain continued to drip onto his quills, the pink petals falling softly like newborn snow. It was a pearly white pink, as pink as the glittering waves upon a sunrise. Pansies lined his thoughts and walks as he continued to analyze what he believed Shadow would think of him.

Soft snow falling on

Sakura sunrises

Reminds me of sweet cherries

I cannot lose you

Like spring you will fade away soon

I must cherish you fully

The ground sparked with yet more life and droplets of rain, Sonic hiding beneath a silver barked tree. Every slip of his fingertips on it just grew wysteria around him. It was hard keeping his pretty hands to himself.

Smelling like spring time

I touch your flaws and hurt thoughts

And like gold paint your wounds

Glow and heal from mistakes

Seeds of harmony burst forth

White roses grow from the cracks

He could hear the reel of a fishing line being cast. He wasn't far from Big's fishing spot. He was sure that Big would tell him the same thing: that he accepted him for what he was currently. Even if all the blue was supposedly washed away in this rain. It did nothing but make the petals and his branches grow more shoots of sakura. It was too difficult to hide his affliction anymore.

Big only focused on his line. He didn't seem to notice Sonic, but Big was always a cat with very few words. He often liked to accentuate his feelings in a sentence or two. It was just easier for everyone involved.

"Hey Big." His eyes were still attuned to the very motion and quiver of his line, no fish hitting it yet. Keyword: yet. It just took time. And time was all Big had.

"I'm guessing you noticed I'm different, right?"

Big didn't have to look to feel how small Sonic felt at this moment.

"Yup."
"Y-y-you think that makes me...completely different, right? Are you going to say the same thing as everyone else, that I'm fine, I'm still Sonic, despite literally waking up and finding out I'm growing a garden everywhere I go. It's jes' not natural, Big. No one does that."

Droplets of rain hit the surface of the pond, emitting ripples of translucent blue water to the lily pads that floated above Big's bait. Big was trying to count all of them when they landed, but it was easily proving to be too difficult for him. At least Sonic was there.

"And you're different. You do a lot of things many people can't."

It was why he was practically worshipped in some circles. He's one of the few able to save the very planet he continued to love. More petals unfurled from his head as the rain continued to water them and let

them bloom underneath the unveiling sunlight. He was already thinking of prettier thoughts.

He could see the koi dancing on the glassy like surface of Big's pond, inviting enticing the rain to continue to drop on them. Their tails unfurled like ball gowns. Things appeared brighter for him, just for that moment.

He kept thinking of what Shadow would think of him. No, Shadow would still love him all the same. Sonic was already beautiful to him. And he was just starting to bloom. His quills hardened like thorns as yet more petals rustled from his head, magnolia sprouts emerging from his branch-like antlers. From within his fingertips he procured a lotus flower, unfurling as the sunlight ran away from the both of them. He placed it carefully on Froggy's head, who used it as shelter. Even a frog or a small Flicky, Sonic tried to help them. That still remained.

Like golden Japanese paint on a broken vase, the flaws only made him brighter, more beautiful.

Rain on my petals

Droplets streaming on fingertips

I give life and light everywhere

Where raindrops can't reach

My heart extends to the sky

The sun is my atrium

"Big, are you happy with how everything is right now?"

It was a question Big grew up hearing a lot, but even with a different person asking the question like Sonic, his answer was still much the same.

His line sunk down, indicating a fish took his bait. Even with all this excitement he still calmly answered.

“Yes.”

Sonic went to their home to meet Shadow, with a large salmon in hand to cook for dinner along with his blueberry pie.

Lilies

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A million thoughts and petals flowed through his head. His thoughts were too beautiful today. He had to have Shadow cut them in two from his disappointment that he was someone else. Different.

His apartment's streets were marbled with a sleek coat of rain. It reflected back at him, reminding him of his pinkness. It was a sight too sore for his eyes. Upon touching the handle a single thorny rose grew from his fingertips and made him bleed. It was as if the flowers grew fangs and bit. Like Shadow might.

Sonic knocked. No answer. He knocked again, yet more pale roses sprouting from his wrists. He wished he could tear them off if they weren't so entwined with his heart. Like being tangled by a bright green thread he knocked again. He could see blood-red eyes gaze back at him, in confusion, and oddly enough, in awe.

"Sonic...what happened to you?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. I just woke up like this."

Sonic just woke up one day and became beautiful, Shadow thought. He's never seen him in anything like more but his cobalt blue self, but him in a magnolia pink...the colour oddly suited him. It would take some time to get used to, of course. But to see the usual sunny hero be as bright as he ever was but still downtrodden was something Shadow knew he couldn't.

Upon sitting on his brown leather couch a wreath of wysteria coated in a parade of purple and white. Yet through all of this Shadow continued to not say anything about his supposedly ruined furniture. With every step Sonic noticed nothing grew underneath Shadow. But

Sonic had peonies dotting everywhere his feet couldn't run. Shadow took each one and added them to a lonely vase on his kitchen table. It wasn't his favorite, but it will do.

"Why did you think I'd hate you for this? This wasn't your fault."

"Well, maybe it was. Tails is still trying to figure that out, but ya never get an answer when ya really need it."

"Is that so?"

Shadow knew everything about inopportune answers. He didn't need to say anything more.

He gave him a cup of water. It was now a cup of lilies. Shadow gathered them anyways. They still weren't his favourite. But they did the trick.

Sonic's iconic smile was wrought with worry. It tried to shine through, but only a small glimmer of light was noticeable in Shadow's eyes. To see him this way made him fraught too. He wanted to do what he can to make him smile brilliantly again. Staring at Sonic made him think that if he wanted to cry he would only shed flower petals than tears. And somehow, this was much worse for Shadow. Sonic was too beautiful to cry. Even with tears of daffodils.

How long would this last? No one knew, Tails was finding a rational answer to an illogical question. What would someone normally do if they were pink and flowers grew everywhere they walked? Just let time go by and let the problem resolve itself? Drink a magic potion and watch all the vivid pink fade away? Run so fast that all the colours of the world just ends up running off its axis? There was no easy answer out of this.

Shadow put a reassuring paw on his shoulder, dusted with yet more white and pink petals. There were no tears in Sonic's eyes but he still couldn't stand to see and hear him like this, naked and ashamed like a leafless tree in May. It was what Sonic couldn't be, or would never

allowed to be.

“I know this won’t last forever, Sonic.”

“And how can you tell it won’t?”

“Because I should know. Nothing ever does.”

There was a somber silence after Shadow’s statement. Sonic knew this because he knew them more than any of his friends. Even Sonic himself could not last forever. Time vanished eventually, in their eyes and hands.

The flower crown Cream made for him never wilted and still remained kingly among his subjects of flora that rose around him. He gave Shadow the remainder of the pie Vanilla made for him, with only two (maybe three, don’t tell anyone) pieces “missing”.

“It’s not bad Sonic. Maybe I should let you have more of a hand in cooking if you promise to not set the smoke detector off again.”

“Don’t get too excited. Vanilla helped. Everything I end up touching in the kitchen will just grow an ecosystem.”

“You did give her more blueberries for the pie, correct?”

“Yeah.”

“Then you were still a great help for her. I’m sure you still are for everyone.”

“How?”

Shadow stood for a moment, quiet, as if mulling over his question like a piece of blueberry pie. Then he was able to give a concise answer.

“By you just being there, of course.”

“How? I’m not myself anymore!”

“Pink or blue, it doesn’t matter. You’re still Sonic and you will always be Sonic. Through and through. And I know that more than anyone. You will always be stubborn, hotheaded, loud, arrogant, a real pain in

the ass, but you are also the kindest selfless and...”

Shadow still gazed at him in his still green eyes.

“...one of the most lovely hedgehogs I ever met. And if anything, you growing roses everywhere you go only accentuates that fact.”

Sonic blinked, a lone rose petal falling on the laminated floor. It was the same colour that he used to be.

“...Thank you, Shadow.”

Even if Shadow insisted, Sonic still remained in his seat, reading. Every page he turned a still blue rose petal turned and shed with every word he uttered in his still pink head. Shadow didn’t care for them, but he made him a steaming plate of chili dogs. “If you weren’t Sonic, you wouldn’t want these, would you? That’s too bad.” He teased him relentlessly that just because his fur was pink it didn’t mean his taste in food changed completely. The pink hedgehog could only smile and hit him with a gardenia pillow playfully. Part of his former self did indeed return. Even if it wasn’t for the same self he met in the mirror this morning.

The peonies, lilacs and Cream’s crown still stood strong dusted with hydrating dew as if they were plucked after the rain. The sun shivered beneath the clouds, slivers of light peeking through, Sonic’s rosy self shimmering through Shadow’s window, a rainbow bloom.

They had their dinner. They talked. More light burst forth into their world and Sonic’s quills nearly appeared a pearly white. To Shadow, he looked godly, as if there were no cracks or faults in his holy visage.

As the minutes wilted and flowed on by, Shadow thought he was becoming a prettier specimen. With every bite of the chili dog he taste a handful of chives, too strong of a taste even for him. It was the gesture that mattered, after all. He still appreciated everything

Shadow did for him, even if they will never taste like the ones he had in Empire City.

And in another few wilting minutes Shadow was lying on top of the pink hedgehog, noting how his chest looked oddly like a heart in his new transformation. It was already soft and malleable like a marshmallow, he thought. He was just more precious with every inch the peonies and lilacs grew. Sonic's nose was buried further in his couch cushions, noting a hint of lavender as they nuzzled and laughed over whatever inane sitcom that was playing on Shadow's CRT television. And as soon as their lips met through their playful teasings, a sprig of lavender formed in between their mouths.

"How did you know lavender was my favourite flower?"

Sonic shrugs and giggles. "I dunno. Just a hunch I guess."

And with each passionate kiss yet another bloom of lavender erupted in between them, Shadow plucking each one and putting them in with the no longer lonely peonies and the lilacs in the vase on the dining room table.

They smelled like Maria's dress. She would've looked lovely in pink too Shadow thought.

"...Thank you Sonic."

Chapter End Notes

> Interesting fact: I wrote this chapter by hand while I was paying another visit to the funny farm and it gets incredibly boring in there. :)

Poppies

In the shadows of the overcast room, Shadow could still see the lavenders, lilacs and peonies hugging together in harmony, wafting in the wind breezing through the cracks in the windows. He could still smell them and they bounced along with Maria's song in his head. The newly pink hedgehog was lying on his stomach as much as he was lying on Sonic's a moment ago, listening to his gentle snoring. With every breath he could smell honeysuckle. The moon was reflected on the glassy surface of the red and green streaked streets, the rain continuing to pitter-patter as they slept.

Like all inopportune things, it was beautiful. A few daisy petals were scraped off from Cream's flower crown, the king fallen to a deep slumber. Shadow sighed, staring at the unsightly visage of his boyfriend, drool dripping from his muzzle and pink quills and petals scattered throughout his couch. It didn't matter. His apartment was already a greenhouse. Why did it truly matter if everything was still a mess?

The waxing of the moon, white as a ceremonial candle lit the sky and flared the lone lotus sitting atop of Sonic's hand. Shadow just wanted to sit and count every star that seared the night sky. And it was what he did until he, fell asleep, too.

As soon as Sonic's eyes flitted awake, he got a call. Tails had urgent news. Most likely about his recent transformation. But of course, he pried his head into their business. Tails wasn't much different from the rest of them. He liked to know what Sonic and Shadow were doing too.

"Did you talk to Shadow? How did he take this?"

Sonic smiled, thinking of last night, Shadow still drunk full of stars. "Just fine."

"Good. I ran some tests, and I think I might've figured out why you're like this, Sonic. Well, maybe. I can give you an educated guess."

An educated guess? Sonic would've been angry with this if it weren't for the fact that the lavenders in his vase still smelled fragrant, and Shadow loved lavenders.

Nothing lasts forever, Sonic.

A poppy grew on his communicator. He shook his head and told himself at least memories did.
"On your last battle with Eggman, did you use an excess of chaos energy? Or did you feel different at least?"
"I felt the same as I always did, Tails."

But yet, you don't recognize yourself in the mirror.

"Come on, I think you knew something was off. At least...a little bit. When you used the power of the emeralds this time, you might've used less power than usual to defeat him."
"Yeah, because I'm too good. I don't even need to use all my energy to beat him! And I bet he doesn't even know it!"

There was that good old brava Sonic usually carried. Yup, Tails could tell he was slowly coming back. It was nice to hear after his freakout the other day.
"Well, when you don't use all that energy, where do you think the rest of it goes? It's simply not going to just go away, is it?"
"When the emeralds go and all is said and done, it just disappears. Right?"

"No, not exactly." Time for another Tails tangent. He could imagine his tails wagging slightly up and down as he explained. It was just one of those quirks Tails always had since Sonic knew him as a kit.
"When you still had some excess energy, it's gotta get out in some way. So literally overnight that energy transferred all throughout your entire body and manifested itself to what you're feeling and seeing now. When I scanned one of your quills your chaotic energy was through the roof!...for at least a little bit. Over time, the energy waxed and waned, and your quill turned blue again."

“It turned blue again? So this whole thing might be temporary?”

Shadow’s ear flickered. He was still fast asleep. Hopefully. He was up throughout the night attempting to count every raindrop on his windowsill.

“Looks like it, if my calculations are correct. It may be a few days, maybe a few weeks, but you should be back to normal by then. You just have excess energy that needs to be burned off, that’s all. But why all the flowers? That’s what I’m trying to find out. Why would all the excess energy just change your fur colour and make you grow plants everywhere? I just don’t understand…”

“Why d’ya need to know all that? This whole thing is just temporary! It’s going to be gone before ya know it! Why even worry about it anymore? Because…” He could visualize Tails rubbing his nose with his finger as he answered. Yet another quirk of his. “I just like finding out why these things happen. It makes the world a lot more interesting.”

Sonic often saw Tails when he wasn’t working on a new invention just often dismantling random devices, seeing how and why they worked before putting them back together again. It was how he often liked to pass his time. “Plus, if it ever happens again, we’ll know why and be prepared, right?”

He didn’t understand, but it was something Tails was going to do regardless. He shook his head, yet more pink and white petals dusting Shadow’s room.
“Sure, fine. I’m just glad to know that it’s all temporary and I’ll be back to normal in no time. Thanks Tails.”

“For now, just don’t touch anything that may be…”

Too late. He touched the communicator and lilacs grew among the circuitry and crevices of the device. Their lecture was abruptly cut short. Again.

“Damn it,” he said.

“And, because of everything, he turns pink and grows flowers everywhere he touches. How cute. He could come over and give me some flowers sometime.”
Shadow sighed as Rouge poured him another glass. It was not overgrown with lillies this time. “Yes, but it’s temporary. Once that energy depletes, he’s back to normal.”

“So it’s just a little annoying, but it’ll go away on its own. Doesn’t sound like too bad of a deal really.”

“Sonic came over to my place and stressed over no longer being himself anymore. I told him the same probably everyone else did: that just because he was pink, it didn’t mean he lost his identity. That was how he was treating the whole affair like.”

Rouge hummed, pouring herself yet another glass of her mixture of iced tea and lemonade. She just stared at the flakes of lemon for a moment, thinking she needed some tulips in her own mantelpiece. Especially some pink ones.

“Why are you feeling like this if he’s going to go back to being himself in a week? You’re not...really liking this new form of his, are you?”

She could sense a hint of green in Shadow’s cheeks. Due to him having alien biology he didn’t blush red like everyone else, but rather, a bright fluorescent green. It was something that Rouge teased him for relentlessly.

“No, it’s...not that at all. I just...don’t think he looks too bad in this new getup of his. That’s all. He doesn’t look bad in pink.”

If Rouge wanted him to appear even more green she would say that he didn’t either, but she kept her hushed lips hushed.

If he was purple I bet he’d love him even more. Just an observation.

She took a long draught of her tea, the sunlight reflecting on the

brown cold waves of her drink. Very few things reminded her of summer until this moment. It was the same with Shadow, until he met Sonic.

“When are you seeing him next?”

He stared at his cup, wishing there was a growth of lilies all around it.

“Very soon.”

Moonflowers

The azurite skies gleamed from the careful hands of the sun, glimmering upon the rosy effervescence of Sonic's quills, many fallen magnolia petals continuously dripping onto the earth, coating the ground around him after the recent rainfall. The puddles that remained after the brief rainy spell were nothing more but just mirrors, reminding Sonic of who he was, who he was becoming, the tendrils of roots and the yearning baby green leaves still remaining attached firmly to his body. He was nothing more but a lively ecosystem. Cornflower blue hydrangeas were affixed to each side of his quills, a bundle of petals adorning his head. Sonic didn't feel he could fight what was going on with his body anymore. It didn't seem like even if he willed himself to, he was still going to grow thorns and roses on his body, both inside and out.

He swore that one morning, he awoke to a hoarse, piercing cough, finding petals and leaves leaving his throat and onto his hands. Which would only cover them more with yet more petals and vines. It almost seemed as if it was only becoming painful to breathe, the rose garden in his heart expanding to more parts of his body faster than his little gardener could ever expect. He swore, too, that a few flowered periwinkles were touching his veins, the inside of his body just feeling the more strange and alien the longer he grew adjusted to this new transformation.

Even if he was told that this was only temporary, "temporary" to Sonic often lasted much longer than he truly wished. Unlike what his friends said, he couldn't really get comfortable with the idea of being a bright pink among those who've known him for what may as been all of his life, as if he was completely changing his personality, everything that felt that made him, him. As deep blue as the deep ocean, his eyes matching the vivid liveliness of the hills he often loved to run on top of and over again. If he was even painted the wrong colour by a careless god, then who was he really? And he was finding it tiring to have to navigate the world with this odd condition, making sure that everything that came into contact with him wouldn't suddenly erupt into a garden. He tried using a handkerchief to grab onto anything, but he soon found out that the handkerchief would

suddenly just burst with white foxgloves, which would just infect everything else he would then touch with said handkerchief with yet more foxgloves. His friends would sometimes assist him, but Sonic was stubborn, and didn't want to be dependent on his friends for too long. Even if he may have helped them far more than he believed, he couldn't help but feel like he wasn't at all the hero of Mobius that he was often called, but rather as nothing more but a burden.

Was it going to get to the point where his friends would be forced to handfeed him his food as if he truly was an animal, just to prevent himself from eating a plant that may have gotten on his food that could've been poisonous?

(This happened after Sonic attempted to eat his usual chili dogs, to only have to be thrown away by Tails when he discovered that part of his bun was being overrun with trumpet flowers, telling him that datura plants were highly toxic. While Sonic appreciated Tails researching botany just to look out for him, there was still a tiny bit of sadness as he watched the perfectly good chili dog be unceremoniously dumped into the trash, the trumpet flowers decaying and rotting away as soon as they left his touch, almost appearing sad and defeated. It didn't matter even if he forego all of his decency and picked it back up. It would just grow those same toxic plants again, Sonic's touch giving life to the same hemlock that may as well have killed starcrossed lovers.)

Over time as he coped with the sudden peculiar changes in his body, he ran. He ran like he always did. He ran across the planet he so wanted to protect, the planet he adored with the vivid colours it all had on display for him every morning, the pinks and greens and blues all coinciding together to make an ethereal, dreamy pastiche every time his eyes adjusted after he would close his eyes and run, run, run, hoping that one of these days, all of these flowers and petals would just fly away from his body and up into the air, never to be seen again. Every time he ran, a long, resplendent row of delphiniums would just mark everywhere he went, every footstep he made giving birth to yet more dawn-kissed flowers, the earth receiving its very own flower crowns from how much Sonic would just run, believing that somehow, he would just simply be fast enough to have all the

flowers inside him just melt away. After all, it was his one coping skill that he believed had always worked for him. He ran, because eventually, the troubles in his mind would no longer be able to catch up with him. He ran, because it was the one thing he knew was still true about himself. He ran, because he wasn't sure of what else he could do, if at all anything.

His friends noted that everywhere they went now seemed to now become vivid, more alive with lines of vivacious trees and flowers, pink petals decorating their paths like natural confetti, their nostrils overwhelmed with the smell of birth and pollen. *Yes,* they knew, *Sonic was here, and even if he didn't mean to, he made our lives much more beautiful.* As if the trees around them were even becoming enamoured with Sonic's new self, they too, were becoming pink, the sunlight stroking among their pretty little veins and arteries that sheltered each tear of sakura that draped over their lady fingers.

As the sun waned down, Sonic's lids were drooping down along with it. He was tired. He tried to run, as far away as he could from this problem, but everything remained the same, all except for the sunflowers that he inadvertently grew for several stretched miles upon the horizon. He realized, now, that he was tired of running. His heart clamoured for stillness. His heart racked against his rib cage, seemingly choked by the roots of the many plants that sunk deep into his flesh, not wishing to be let go. He breathed in, the warm sultry air, however, feeling good, drinking the amiable sunlight in.

The yawning entrance of a forest nearby beckoned him in, the shuddering of the green veins that towered above him becoming caressed and tickled by that same humid wind. The remainder of the raindrops that trickled down the leaves could still be felt in Sonic's quills. All it ever really did was drench the hydrangeas, making them grow fuller than ever before. It was really the last thing Sonic ever wanted. To cultivate his problem and make it even bigger and more noticeable than before.

Irritated, an exasperated sigh escaped from his lips, utilizing a monstera leaf to shield him from Adam's ale that came from the thin

nails of the trees.

“I can’t keep goin’ on like this.”

Sonic didn’t seem to mind that he was by himself, the only company who could listen to him were the wind and the trees. Even if he felt the trees could whisper to him by letting that same wind brush against their branches, he just preferred the silence, reflecting on his own fragile thoughts.

“All I’m doin’ is just draggin’ everyone else behind with all of this. There’s no way they actually mean that I’m still the same Sonic they know.”

Sighing again, allowing the sakura-scented air enter his lungs yet again, he sat down in the cushiony dark blue grass, his hands behind his head, attempting to look for the emerging shimmer of the stars in the night sky. It was much harder to see them, with all the stretching fingers of the trees choking out the moon, the scant traces of moonlight veiled by shadows. Freeing one of his arms from his head, he points skyward to nothing in particular, a luminous moonflower blossoming from within his fingertips. It was peculiar, he thought, that whenever he would find himself thinking of the moon, a moonflower would grow from his body. Thinking of blueberry pie, a bushel of blueberries would cover Sonic’s vivid body from head to toe, creating enough berries for maybe two pies. Mint leaves would surround his shoulders and ears when he smelled hot astringent peppermint in Amy’s home. While he couldn’t control how quickly everything grew and bloomed around him, he at the very least could control what flower or plant would burst from his natural touch if he loosely thought of something that related to that plant in question. It was a skill he over time practiced, but there were still unfortunately some errors and mishaps he would make. The chili dog that may as well have been laced with cyanide was one of the depressing casualties of his newfound power.

“What if…” Closing his eyes, he truly didn’t wish to dwell on the *what ifs* and the *have nots.* But it was a fear of his, even if his friends truly believed it was irrational. To no longer be able to help anyone that truly needed it, all because his body was undergoing unfathomable changes that no one could assist him with. “What if Tails is wrong? I know my buddy is never wrong, but there’s always a first for everything.”

Thinking of Tails wagging his two tails in excitement explaining to him this potential strange phenomenon, he grew yet another foxglove upon his wrist, ripping it out and allowing it to remain on the black forest floor. A few drops of blood seeped from its roots, but Sonic was ultimately unharmed. Nothing that a pastel coloured band-aid couldn’t fix.

As he listened closely to the wind shimmering in the trees, his pointed ears erect and attentive to anything else that may be in the environment around him, he thought for a moment that he could hear footsteps, the leaves being pulled in a direction that the wind wasn’t going. As if there was yet another creature that matched his speed was following the trail of flowers that marked where Sonic was currently sitting at, the hedgehog’s footsteps obvious to anyone who knew about his condition.

“Look, I know it’s you Shadow. You don’t have to play mysterious shadowy figure all the time whenever you want to sit down and talk to me you know.”

A huff. The footsteps got closer, but they seemed relaxed, the so-called black mysterious shadowy figure of a hedgehog clearly visible to Sonic now, who for a brief moment even had a small smile on his face from effectively calling his bluff.

“Then what would you rather I do for you then?”

“Ya know. Just sayin’ ‘hi Sonic, how are you?’ would work. Don’t have to act all cool and stoic if all yer lookin’ for is just a simple conversation.”

Shadow sighed, crossing his arms as he analyzed the pink hedgehog

that stuck out like a sore thumb in the dark as black forest, along with the glowing moonflower that rested on his fingertip. “Well, I’m afraid our conversation isn’t going to really be as simple as you want it to be.”

A small sprout of a hydnora would suddenly sprout from Sonic’s throat abruptly, before Sonic would carelessly tear it off like the foxgloves before him, only a minuscule slice of red emerging from his skin, letting it drop decayed and blackened like the rest of the forest around them. Sonic found out that he would inexplicably grow hydnoras and Devil’s Claws whenever he was nervous or had uncomfortable thoughts, as they were often very uncomfortable plants for him to visualize.

“It’s okay Sonic. I know none of this is your fault and you can’t help it. We still don’t fully know what’s going on and I can imagine that’s very scary for you.”

Sonic chuckled darkly. Something he allegedly always did, but with a hint of moroseness and fear. A sound that he often didn’t wish to acknowledge. “Scary? I wouldn’t just call havin’ no control of your body and not being able to do the things you love because of all the strange things your body is doin’ ‘scary’. It’s somethin’ that many can’t imagine. It’s horrible. I’m doin’ nothin’ but having my friends take care of me and doin’ stuff for me that used to be so easy. Sure, they want to help me, but all I’m doin’ is just burdening them. What if Eggman comes out of hiding and starts attacking the city again? Ya know he never goes away for long. He’ll always come back. And when he does, I can’t help my friends. I can’t help the people who really need me. People can seriously get hurt because of me, or even worse, they could…”

There was a moment where Sonic could feel something briefly touching one of his paws, as a dark, silhouetted arm reached over and tentatively stroked part of his gloved hand, a silent, concerned gesture.

Sonic just only seems to sigh, pulling his arm away, the gloves firmly in place over his paw. How could he deserve such compassion. How could he rightfully deserve another caring, warm touch to reassure him that everything was completely fine and there was nothing truly rotten or ugly about the world he was inundated with, opening his eyes. Sonic just slowly blinks, as if in acknowledgment of Shadow's attempts to comfort him, lone illuminated petals of moonflowers seeping and bleeding through his fingertips. It looked much like the same colour of the moon, almost an aged, ale-like yellow crevassing the ends of its petals. It was the only thing apparent in Shadow's vision, looking as bright as the lone spectral orb that watched the blanketing clouds darken and smother all the light around it.

"You're right that Eggman will always find a way back. But that doesn't mean you're helpless. Giving you an entirely different shade and side of yourself doesn't make you weak."

Sonic could only gaze back at the moonflowers that began to illuminate and emanate from underneath his fingertips, their ghastly faces looking more similar to the moon the longer he watched each one bloom and unfurl from every seed that his touch just seemed to germinate from within. He wasn't sure why, but looking at Shadow's face at that moment just gave him a more baleful glare than the moon did at the moment, closing his eyes as he breathed in more of the chilled forest air around him.

"This isn't the side of me that people really want though. Just seeing myself like this...I just don't feel as strong. As capable of protecting others. Nothing feels right underneath my skin. It just feels so weird to just wake up every morning, knowing that you just somehow have a million plants just running all through your bloodstream, showing up whenever you dare touch someone to know they're still real, unlike everything else."

It all felt ethereal, yet unreal to Sonic. Looking at the world around him with a fuzzier, mystical lens as his fingertips that continued to

give birth to all sorts of glowing moonflowers, neon blue bleeding fairy helmet mushrooms and sky blue delphiniums, feeling the heartbeat and the trickling blood of the earth flowing all throughout his veins as well, feeling his own self cohabitating with some other spirit. Nothing felt as if it truly belonged to him, that it was only him in this oddly fairly fantastical reality he was finding himself in. The many apparitional growths that were happening around him were only making it difficult for even Shadow to continue looking deeper into his still vivid emerald eyes, just as green as he was making the world around him.

Cornflower blue. The same colour as Maria's dress, Shadow surmised.

"Who said people didn't want this side of you? I don't recall anyone saying that to you except to yourself."

"Man, are you crazy, Shads?" The longer Sonic laid in the pile of blue grass, his body nearly becoming ingrained and entwined with Shadow's own, the entire landscape becoming much more blue, illuminated, nearly eerie, but it all seemed to match the darkening, swallowing skies, the entire unknown world beyond them only shuttered out in bleak darkness, all except for the many natural lights that surrounded both of the hedgehogs. As the wind rustled inbetween the tree's fingertips, the twinkling of glimmering, chime-like leaves singing, it felt as if it was only a matter of time before Shadow could witness the other's stubborn resolve slowly fading, the world only responding by making itself more beautiful and brighter the more they talked.

"It's not like I can just go on like this for the rest of my life and don't expect anyone to care. You know that people will need me. And if I'm never there for them, then what else is there for people to like about me anymore?"

Shadow's eyes widen momentarily, this statement seemingly hurting him much like the thorns that constantly surrounded Sonic's heart. "Do you really think that's all people want and expect of you? Just to help them and to receive nothing in return?"

Sonic scoffed. "Well, isn't that because that's normally the right thing

to do, yeah? Like, I don't expect a little kid to immediately return the favour to me just because I saved their life. Wouldn't most people do the same if they were in the same situation? They'd save a kid's life just because it's the right thing to do, because he deserves to keep living through life and experience all it has to offer. You don't do it because you're expectin' them to give you lots of money or whatever."

Shadow momentarily paused, reflecting as the wind once again whistled from the branches in the forest and in between Sonic's own that were emerging further from his quills, as if he was transforming slowly to more of a cervid-like appearance. White blossoms dripped from his wooden crown like tears, believing fully on how much of himself he was truly losing.

"You're right, but eventually, people notice those good deeds, and how much you're actually trying to improve the world around you. They soon see how much better you're making the world just by...being alive, and soon, they don't want to watch you struggle anymore with your own problems. They soon want to give you their own helping hands because they know that you would do the same for them without even thinking a second thought. They see all of the lavender roses that grows from your head every time you think of your tentative thoughts and they can only reflect on how lovely of a person you really are."

Lovely. Pretty. The very same thoughts that many would often use to describe a colourful flower that only paints the bright, breathing world into all the wondrous and lovely colours that the eyes could only wish to fully absorb and remember for as long as they can breathe. A lone peony in a field of drab, deadened earth were often enough for anyone's eyes to pluck and love the one singular pretty thing that grew among tragedy and the callousness that very same life could bring.

Brushing his paws on an emerging, luminescent sprout of a cornflower blue delphinium, he picks it up gently, akin to how one would almost pick up a delicate small creature, observing how much brighter and beautiful it was becoming as the stars scintillated in the skyward canvas above them, a generous stroke of royal blue watercolours seeping into the opaque darkness that coated them. If Sonic wasn't just as bright and glowing as the bouquet he constantly grew from inside of his heart, it would be the main focal point of the work of art

that nature was sometimes, everything illuminated and palliated inches from its loving glass-like petals. Around Sonic's feet were sproutlings of periwinkles that were just as blue as he used to be, the outlines of their petals tasted and graced by the moon's pallid light.

Each flower that seemed to sprout from every vein and stirring of Sonic's life from within his body always seemed to correlate with his specific situation at hand. The sprouts of peppermint that surrounded his wrists as he met with Amy, unperturbed by his new appearance and only continuing to sip on her peppermint tea. The bushels of blueberries that emerged when he helped Vanilla with her baking. The many lotus flowers that had their fingertips reach towards the moonlit night as Big looked on for Froggy's approval from across the pond he was fishing in. Even when Sonic wasn't thinking, every flower that now surrounded and towered over Shadow represented something that Sonic seemed to be thinking and feeling, or even if he felt this bouquet that thrummed from within him were more colour palette appropriate for the environment they were now in. Every thought that bloomed in Sonic's head always would soon make way for a flower, their stems firmly rooted in Sonic's consciousness.

Moonflowers, last Shadow read, represented the constant, relentless search that people would conduct when their entire world was entirely clouded in darkness, looking for the lone remnants of beauty that still remained and thrived around them. The one radiant trace of positivity.

It seemed silly to think, at least to Shadow in any other moment of his life, that a bright pink hedgehog would, at least to him, would represent that one drop of brightness in an otherwise bleak and dying world in Shadow's eyes, but nothing at this moment really seemed silly. Nothing felt real as he kept gazing at his pastel fur, coated laboriously with yet more lavender petals as he closed his eyes and focused on the same face in the sky that graced all of the flowers he effortlessly gave birth to all around him.

Delphiniums were often signified as “big-hearted.” The very same blues that may as well have used to dye Maria’s own dress often painted a dignified figure full of grace. They were born from the very blood of a celebrated war hero as he gave his life bravely in combat. It didn’t seem too further off to Shadow that Sonic’s blood was much the same as each delphinium seed was nurtured and burst open at the seams every time the heroic hedgehog seemed to breathe and have his big heart beat all throughout him. It was almost as if anyone truly wished to do so, if they cut open his heart, they would find nothing more but roots and sprouts of cornflower blue delphiniums, spreading light and life all throughout his body much like his veins and arteries would.

The moon was slowly veiling itself among the gray darkened clouds that surrounded it, the tall effervescent stalks of the mycena mushrooms encasing the entire world around them as if they were streetlamps guiding both Sonic and Shadow as they traversed this odd, eerie world around them, the spectral glowing sodium-coloured orbs drifting from the royal blue grass and upwards to the dark heavens. Every footstep Sonic made yet more luminescent fairy rings would emerge, neon green tall silhouettes painstakingly watching the hedgehogs movements. They were talking and discussing amongst each other, but about what, not even Sonic could truly remember. It all seemed like reflecting on it now it was all pointless. It didn’t truly mattered on what the other said. It was just one of those things. Everything around you just looked like it was inordinately blessed by God or some other merciful spiritual being and sometimes it truly didn’t matter what the other said, if anything. Because it was all beautiful. The night air felt so good blowing past their quills. It was warm, yet there was enough of a chilly touch from within the air’s fingertips, reminding you for a brief moment that you were alive and you could feel, and it all felt good for once. The ponds around them, even if seemingly untouched by Sonic’s breath of life, were at once stirring with the dancing of the calico ballroom gowns of the koi that slept underneath the glass veil of their aquamarine world, the lotus flowers in full unraveling of their maternal piercing white dresses as the moon kissed each and every one of their faces. Other than the quiet murmuring of their voices, there was no other sound but the wind, tickling and giggling from amongst itself from the tree branches, as if watching the two hedgehogs on curiously. A sonata of crickets chirping as they their legs strung along and plucked on a plaintive violin, accentuating the stillness of the pitch black night.

The further the hedgehogs talked, yet more emerging sproutlings of pastel purple roses would emerge slowly from Sonic's head, quills, and ears, while long dusted tendrils of lavender would occasionally wrap around his fingertips, every touch and inquisitive stroke on Shadow's fur and skin smelling much like the tranquility he could only visibly imagine in his mind every time he took a long breath of wild lavender from within his nostrils and lungs, hoping that he too would somehow just grow them from within his lungs and cough fragrant petals every time something upsetted him. It didn't take much sleuthing for Shadow to know that from within Sonic's own personal garden he was now thinking of him.

Sure, maybe Shadow joked at one point that if they ever wanted to have their own home to move in together, their front yard would be littered with a vast vibrant blanket of lavenders, the entire earth their house would be built on a vivid pastel violet, looking much more colourful and peaceful than anywhere that may be close to them. But he was thinking maybe Sonic was taking the lavender association with him a bit too far. Even then, there was something that Shadow didn't mind in all of this. In finding that even Sonic himself took pleasure and delight in what to many would be considered the simplest pleasures in life. Just witnessing the beauty that the very birth and renewal of life had to offer to both of them.

Roses meant a variety of things, Shadow discovered. Depending on which shade of colour the rose was given their entire interpretation would change depending on whose eyes would gaze upon them. Red roses were universal with love and ardent passion. White roses are often symbolized with innocence and purity, unmarred by the marks of sinful pigment. Green roses represented fertility and harmony, much like the many hills he would often find his lover's footprints in, a trail of emerald roses following every step Sonic would walk, even a few green rose heads rising vicariously through shallow pools of rainwater he inadvertently found himself plunged in.

After what only seemed to be an eternity to Sonic, he found himself

remembering entirely on what he originally was going to ask Shadow, before all those fancy, lovely semantics had to arrive, clouding Sonic's thoughts further with all of the cascades of flower petals that decorated his pearly pink quills. "Shadow, why did you even bother finding me all the way here anyways? Didn't you say you had...like, a mission or somethin' to deal with?"

Shadow shook his head, his face softening slightly, but still attempting to appear as stoic as he could reasonably be, even if it was only to keep up familiar appearances with his friends. "No. I never said any of that."

"Then why did you…"

"You simply don't always have to have a reason."

"So you're just here, finding out where I ran to, just because you simply could?"

From within a few bright notes of Shadow's laughter, a few moonflowers fully unfurled their petals to the world, their snowy starstruck faces coruscating through the darkened veil of the forest, along with a few glowing neon stalks of a few mushrooms gathering and clambering over a tree stump that Sonic's fingers would only brush up against for what may have been only a few milliseconds. "How hard is it to find you anymore, hedgehog? Especially with a trail of flowers following you everywhere you go. It wouldn't be that obtuse to imagine that someone else could easily much do the same. Even in fields where I see nothing but stalks of lavender I can't help but imagine you're not far off."

Sonic could only seemingly sigh dejectedly, watching intently as yet a few more violet sprigs of lavender would coil and unravel themselves inbetween his fingertips, halving themselves over Sonic's tightened fist. It often was unusual, Shadow thought, to find each other in much the complete opposite of their usual moods, Shadow finding light and warmth among the fading eerie glows of the fireflies around them as the moonflowers and periwinkles shone around every step of the forest ground they made while Sonic could only find himself confused, disorientated, unable to rationalize why one would seemingly love someone who appeared to be broken, and arguably, useless to those who once found love and worth in such a someone who once wasn't so broken and unperturbed by such silent, delicate thoughts.

Did he really need to tell him why? He knew that Sonic knew. He

knew all along. It wasn't until that Sonic would just wake up one day, not feeling like the one that he would know would much feel like himself, that he questioned if he still did. Because according to him, he was no longer Sonic, but a shell, a fragment of everything he so claimed to be, or what others have told him he had to be.

It wasn't very often that Shadow would find lavender roses out in the vast wild, even in flowershops. He wasn't entirely sure as to why, except that maybe they were truly more special than most roses. A reasoning that humans would make for such a flower to be such a rarity than most. Many wanting a bouquet of roses would often just ask for red, pink, or white ones, as those were the most common spoken words in the flower's language.

Shadow often found himself struggling to say the exact answer he just wanted to finally tell Sonic. He couldn't help but envy Sonic's condition, if only because he simply wanted a reasonable excuse to never be able to speak and never let the painful, thistled emotional thoughts he would often have for those he cared about attempt to writhe and cut his throat. To only close his eyes and say to himself defiantly he could never let himself get too close, the small pools of blood from his throat to his lips collecting on the ground like raindrops on a cold windowpane.

So, instead, he did something that he could only reflect later that he should've done in the very beginning.

As Sonic stared at the ground, watching the long flowing tendrils of starstudded periwinkles being birthed from his feet, Shadow would slowly, almost seemingly in a provocative manner, would find one of his fingertips stroking through Sonic's cherry blossomed quills, to gently flick his wrist upon plucking a lone strand of a newly grown lavender rose, the glint of the returning moonlight refracted from its petals. No other words seemed to be shared between them, Shadow's eyes carefully glancing back at Sonic's as he revealed the nearly pristine, opalescent flower onto his own hands, Shadow briefly greeted and held by Sonic's own impassioned strands and sprouts of lavender. They didn't want to let him go, but they somehow knew that eventually, they would never have to.

They said it was rare that many people would find love from seeing someone they would adore the first time their eyes fell upon them. And not many who sought that love would continue seeking it, nurturing it until they would inevitably bloom whenever the next spring would arise. Turns out that both flowers and relationships were not too different, as they both craved sunshine, hard strenuous work, and love in order to fully grow into a beautiful, desired work of nature, although many would sure that a little bit of water certainly couldn't harm them either, even if it was only a sliver that seeped from someone's eye as they told them everything that a lavender rose represented, to not only him, but everyone that inevitably graced his life.

We've always loved you, immediately when we first saw you. We've always loved you because we always believed you were beautiful, no matter what colour or flower you've felt yourself to be.

Sonic would smile, his fangs glinting in the moonlight much like the clouded shard of the moon of the wooded sky. He replied to Shadow's gesture, ultimately saying nothing, but handing him a crumpled mass of torn, wet forget-me-nots. They were resilient, only submerging their roots into Shadow's skin and heart, to remain until Shadow would stop counting the days and the raindrops that would gather around him. They would remain until he would knew he would soon talk to God, thanking him for all the pretty lovely things he made.

Primroses

Nothing ever seemed to stay silent for too long.

Even if everything in the world seemed bright and beautiful, with the birds breaking the dawn's silence with their plaintive, warbles accentuating the pink sun that was looking oddly similar to a certain hedgehog, at least, one that seemed so different to the hedgehog that everyone seemed to remember. There seemed to be too many flowers hazing his vision, the overwhelming stuffy pollen just triggering his allergies much more severely than usual. Nearly blinding his sight with a viscous veil of his tears everywhere a tulip and magnolia petals may have been, which was always not too far away from wherever he existed. The fragrant and overpowering scent of amber and lilacs and peaflowers were suffocating him akin to a constricting noose around his small fragile neck.

Nothing was ever going to remain the same. Nothing ever remained peaceful and still for so long. Even Mother Nature would soon darken all the colours of the world at the end of the year, touching every single flower and plant with a frosty, algid touch that crumbled and withered away the most vibrant of greens and yellows. Even the birds would soon have to fly south, their songs every daybreak soon becoming muffled and the stillness only broken apart by the breaths of Nature's winter lungs.

Everything changed in life, for both better and worse. It may have been one of the reasons why Sonic seemed to appreciate every good thing that occurred to him, knowing that it was all the more better to know these things just simply couldn't always happen, because it just would've ruined the main decadent dish that life had to offer to anyone.

Often times though, Dr. Ivo "Isaac" Robotnik (or "Eggman" as he would soon be called, much to his dismay) always wanted a little bit more in every meal life served him. The bread and meat ratio in his

sub sandwiches just had to be exactly the way he wanted it, otherwise it may as well as be good as the dirt he was currently standing, still teeming and overflowing with miraculous life that Sonic's steps may have given it. If his Eggs Benedict had too little or too much Hollandaise sauce, he may as well have requested for Mother Nature to throw and toss away yet another creation of hers. If life simply didn't serve him everything exactly the way he truly desired it, then he wasn't one to let life and Mother Nature continue to have their ways. No, Ivo often had the fortitude that if no one was surely going to let him have things the way he wanted them or saw them, then he often tried to change that himself. After all, if no one else surely was smart enough to truly see things the only and correct way he saw and analyzed everything, then the only one who truly could make things better for himself, was of course, himself.

Nothing was ever going to stay the same for everyone who happened to exist alongside Ivo Robotnik. Because he knew he was the only one he could truly depend on to actually change life for the better, even if it was only better for truly only himself.

Sure, he often constructed his robot lackeys in his own vision, even granting them the ability to have their own personalities and quirks, something almost nearly unheard of for all other android and robot manufacturers and programmers, to supposedly assist him on his justified and righteous missions. But often times, they were either too dimwitted, would only respond to his seemingly simple inquiries and tasks with a muttering sarcastic remark as they halfheartedly did as they were told, or just confounded nincompoop scrapheaps that he very well could dismantle and rearrange into a better image of what he truly wanted but he would supposedly never get around to do so. Did these lackeys of his ever really did anything that was correct and even impressive for his standards?

No, never. They never seemed to. And why couldn't they? They were created with Ivo's godlike hands after all, he surely could make them better, stronger, smarter, and more efficient at doing their tasks if he truly wasn't satisfied with their performance? After all, software often would go through several stages of development in order to improve and get better at their chosen task by their creator. Prototypes, alphas,

betas, even distributing updates and patches so they can improve and perform with less bugs and glitches in their system, as if they were growing and evolving over time alongside their human counterparts. He even shut his eyes briefly, nearly sighing, irritated that he had to hear that damned foxboy's voice in his head again, the only other one out there he truly felt who could match and rival his ingenuity and skill in robotics and mechanical science.

If they keep messing up everything for you, why not just take them apart and make them better? You surely know you can do that, right?

He pushed his glasses onto the bridge of his nose, sniffling over the prevailing chokehold of the pollen around him. It was getting harder for him to see, his eyes continuing to tear up and burn. Hearing that dreaded voice of his along with his prevalent allergies were beginning to give him a colossal, throbbing headache. And he was already starting to run low on his supplies of aspirin and antihistamines just to help him in continuing to do his diligent work in making the world a better place for himself.

Sure, a simple solution. He very easily could take Cubot and make him smarter, even give him a new voice that didn't clue the rest of his long-sworn nemeses that maybe he had a little bug or error in coding his core personality. He could make it to where Orbot would follow his every command and barking order with no complaint or an annoying plea that there was a better way in doing things the way he knew were truly the only best ways in doing things. He could make it to where Scratch didn't have a high-pitched screeching voice, he could make it to where Grounder could actually lift things with actual hands and not be completely clueless and dull when it came to anything Robotnik ordered him to do. But as Tails' relatively innocent inquiry continued to echo into the recesses of what he may as well call his massive, immense, 300 IQ brain, he simply could only shake his head no, and continue letting his lackeys live with everything he's initially given them.

He felt the only reason why he didn't was because God simply didn't take everything he created in His own image and kept changing and

“fixing” these supposed faults in them until they were exactly perfect and unconditionally obedient to every word He spoke. It was up to his own creation’s free will in order to improve and adapt to their circumstances and surroundings. It would only be their responsibility and theirs alone on what they would do with their life He gave them.

He prided himself on possibly being the first, and the only, scientist that gave a few of his own robotic creations an actual soul, something that actually all too closely resembled the company and companionship that Ivo couldn’t help but feel on many nights that he was sorely lacking from other human beings, feeling as if it was too difficult for him to relate to any of them he could’ve possibly met on a personal level. Many of the things they would often talk about were never all that interesting to him. They always seemed so aimless and lacked any direction for meaningful change in this life they were all stuck in, at least according to him. And he often found it too exhausting to listen to them, gaze at them in the eyes like supposedly all the “normal people” did, and continue on with socializing with them about meaningless things like the weather or how they personally felt about everything. It was tiring, all just from trying to relate to his common man, to not feel empty and forgotten about in this fortress he painstakingly built, away from most of civilization as if he was an evil bad thing that needed to be put away for the safety and convenience of everyone else.

Despite his eccentricities, Eggman was just like everyone else, and desired closeness and social contact with other human beings. Despite his peculiar shape and stature, Ivo was human too, and was wired to not wish to be isolated and alone like other intelligent creatures. But because he often found himself finding conversations and his attempts to not make them uncomfortable and awkward with his sheer presence tiring, he just simply did what he felt he was just always conditioned to do, and just solve these problems and conundrums his own way.

“Your Egg in the Basket, with lightly burnt Canadian bacon and freshly squeezed orange juice, sir.”

As always, even if Orbot was truly attempting to please his master and who may as well be his own God with every breakfast he slaved and cooked for him, there always seemed to be something wrong with the way Orbot did it. Because it just wasn't the way that Robotnik thought was truly the way to do things, only if because it wasn't him himself serving the breakfast he actually truly wished for.

"There's too much pulp in the orange juice! And the eggs in the toast are too runny! You didn't even bother putting chives on the eggs, did you? How am I even *supposed* to eat this? This is much too subpar for a man of great intellect like myself!"

No matter how often he complained about Orbot's supposed poor performance however, he ate his breakfasts like this as if he forgot every scathing criticism he just gave him, but he never seemed to ever tell him that his own creation was improving with every dish he made for him, even if those improvements were trivial and meager to his critical eye.

And as always, Orbot just sighs, places the tray near where Eggman often sat, and just watched him practically engorge himself anyways. His efforts were never going to matter to him. It only made the vectored red orb robot somehow relate to his flesh and blood co-inhabitants whenever they would try their best to appease their gods and only be told that their offerings weren't good enough to not have their crops dry out and wither during yet another spiteful scorching drought.

According to Eggman's research, there was no hint of a drought anywhere wherever he walked, when he felt he needed to at least get a few minutes of sunshine and air from his steel-clad but often comforting fortress among the alleged chaos and irrationality the outside world brought to him. While the sun was bright and opposing, the earth was given a newfound vitality, many colourful and vivid stems and fingers were rising to kiss the face of their own bright shining god. He felt he's seen tulips everywhere in every colour and shade that very same Mother Nature offered. He swore that all the tall and proud sunflowers that wished to replace the same sun they were

named after ominously stared him down much too often, nearly finding himself face to face with their capricious bright smiles, almost in mocking unison. It often disconcerted him that the hills he was starting to attempt to be comfortable and make nice with were now being devoured and assailed by blooming periwinkles and cornflowers, coating the once vivacious emerald hills with a zealous coat of blue paint.

And he's always hated the colour blue. That very same shade of cobalt blue that he couldn't help but sense he was becoming too familiar with at this point, always running and speeding through his superior head.

There was too much nature. Too much prettiness and beauty in everything. It made Ivo's eyes strain from forcing himself to stare at it for too long, even if the only reason he felt he had to hurt his eyes was only out of pure unfiltered spite.

"Sir, do you think that it's plausible that maybe Sonic is responsible for all of this sudden growth around us? Even searching online for any articles that may explain a rational scientific reason for all of this happening seems to only turn out to be dead ends. Even experts can't figure out why, and I can't help but feel that maybe…"

Nothing ever truly seemed to anger Eggman more than having a peculiar, almost miraculous event occur with almost no actual scientific reasoning happen right in front of him. If nothing made rational sense to him, then that very thing may as well have never actually happened at all.

A swine-like grunt emitted from him, his mind trying to find any other reasoning in his head that was somewhat plausible to him. And if there wasn't, he knew it all had to be that blue rat. That very same blue rat who constantly ran in circles in his mind, and the supposed mad doctor never seemed like he was ever able to be rid of him.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if that blasted hedgehog was behind all of this…”

Orbot shook his head once more, and sighed. Sure, it was entirely possible, but he couldn’t help but feel the very same doctor who gave him his own free will, eyes to see the world with, and a way to speak and to convey his very own thoughts and feelings, was becoming more megalomaniacal the more time slipped past them, only thinking of exacting revenge on this rodent (which Orbot has attempted to tell him that hedgehogs were actually not in fact rodents, but technically *Erinaceidae* but Robotnik often refused to hear him out, believing that Sonic was more closely related to an animal that he hated and despised more than anything else.

The glowing blue computer screen showed Eggman a map of the world around him, along with notable locations that he would jot down were places that Sonic often frequented. The forest where he would relax and take his iconic 7 pm naps underneath a tree, the homes and apartments where his friends resided, and anywhere a chili dog vendor was brave enough to not only feed a creature who may as well have a bottomless pit of a stomach for his concoctions, but to hope that same creature also wasn’t going to ask for him to make the water where he boiled his hotdogs at to become a carbonated beverage for him to drink on the run too. He very well could’ve stuck a tracking device on anything of Sonic’s, but in truth, he didn’t really need to.

It was being reported that there was a long trail of primroses, daylilies, and freesias growing in rapid numbers wherever there seemed to be a cart full of those delicious treats (along with a possible tasty beverage), and it seemed he would be able to find that damned *erinaceidae* easily enough, just following wherever there was a long delicate necklace around the earth.

“You really think Sonic is responsible for all of this sudden growth, sir? I may still have my doubts…”

“100%. There’s *no doubt* in my mind. This just all seemed to happen after our very last bout. How convenient for all of them. That rat just dangling his victory over me by having all of these flowers pop up.”

He sneezed. Just even thinking of all of the sudden growth around him was only making his eyes yet more of a wrathful torrent, a few slivers of tears dripping down onto his research. It didn’t seem to help that he was slightly allergic to primroses too.

“Absolutely no doubt. I noticed after he damaged all of my robots (*which were very expensive, mind you!*) there was an odd glow to him. Something that I may have never seen before until now…”

There always seemed to be some sort of ethereal glow to Sonic, his fur diaphanous with the same shade of blue as a cloudless sky. Even closing his eyes he can only imagine his own citrine eyes gazing back at him, that same beast never leaving him be even in his own diligent thoughts.

But after all was said and done and he had to either repair the robots that managed to survive his assault with only a few scars or completely replace them and feel as if he lost his own comrades, even if he never gave them the same sort of Godly spirit as he granted his two assistants? He noticed a brilliant sheen as he nonchalantly walked away, his quills reminiscent of the same bladed pallid mark of the moon as little by little his blue self was fading away, Sonic seeming to never notice this as the doctor always believed such simple, stupid animals like him had a one-track mind. He was only focused on his goal on thwarting his efforts and not much more. Searching for the rest of his memories of their last battle, a scant flash of a white Sonic that was familiar to the same cottony colour as lilies seemed to appear in his mind, but even he believed...that he couldn’t believe it.

“It may be just like with Chaos energy and the Emeralds. He may be receiving some form of energy and I’m not entirely sure where, but I’m sure he’s as clueless as we are about it.”

Orbot’s electric lids blinked slowly, as if he was absorbing every word

that came from his lips. Even his henchmen didn't want to have him run in a specially made hedgehog wheel inside their own programmed brains as well, but the doctor had told him of some incredible feats he somehow managed to accomplish, feats that even he himself wasn't sure were even possible. Using Chaos Control and saving himself from what would've been certain death by using a fake Emerald Tails produced (and he was *very certain* that that foxboy wouldn't be smart enough to actually create an actual Chaos Emerald blessed by the Ancients, because no one truly was), having no one be able to pinpoint exactly how this hedgehog was able to run 767 miles an hour (when real hedgehogs are only able to run 4 mph), and manage to defeat deities that would not only attempt to oppose the stubborn hedgehog but even the doctor himself, his very own scarred hands and intellect somehow never even coming close to ridding himself and the rest of the world with imminent disaster. If there was an event that happened to the world that science could never explain, it always seemed to relate to Sonic, as if he was an actual deity himself.

He never doubted his master's theories, but still, he wished there could be one day where he just never had to worry about him. His master may have been harsh, often ignoring all of his efforts, but yet there was something in him that always worried about his own mental and physical health whenever he decided it was time to see what the rat was up to. Blame it on his own wired programming, he thought, but it was still an emotion he couldn't just easily shake away.

And just like every other time when he felt he had to put forth all of his efforts into defeating Sonic, he would often disappear into his lab for days at a time, relentlessly searching for any sort of answer or strategy to what he must've done wrong. *No,* he could only think, *it's not me. I'm not wrong. I'm never wrong. Sonic is simply borrowing all of his powers and abilities from somewhere else and it's always enough to foil my plans. If it was anyone else, I would win, and I would be sitting atop my throne with an egg-shaped crown.* Even when trying to search for reasons on how Sonic defeated him, he always came to the conclusion that he possibly may have cheated, that he never seemed to want to play nice with his machines. After all, why should he? Sonic was the very opposing force to the industrialization of humankind. He would do whatever it would take just so the doctor couldn't shove the entire

earth in a bell jar, ironclad and dead, cindered into ashes. Eggman was simply the genius philanthropist who just believed the world would be a much better place with all of these advances in technology he proposed, because they were his ideas and his alone, and he only wanted to make things the way he felt was really the correct and true way to do them. And of course, that was always his way.

While he knew it would be impossible to capture everything, he had a habit of letting either Orbot or Cubot sit on the sidelines as they fought, recording everything that happened between them, usually as a way for Eggman to study the footage later and see where exactly his own way may have led him astray. Orbot would cast the ghostly, electronic visage of Sonic as he would effortlessly kick yet another Motobug away, his very same cyber-electronic lids able to play any files they recorded. Multiple times the doctor would repeat some scenes, freeze frame, and have his own tired, embittered eyes look over the footage, scraping every holographic image of Sonic he could in his retinas, wanting to find the unscientific answer to why this was happening to them, and the just as unscientific answer to why Eggman lost yet another fight.

When he was thrashing against yet another badnik, he looked the same, his usual idyllic cobalt blue, that very same shade of blue that Robotnik grew to hate and detest. When he fast forwarded some more, Sonic was still blue, but it took a careful search to find that the very tips of his quills were beginning to desaturate, a bright white colour that reminded him of the bright white sun that would often blind him whenever it reflected off his metallic surfaces when he would rise from bed, almost starting his day by blinding him. Scouring through yet more of the recorded footage, the very same bleached whiteness was slowly becoming more apparent. And when the entire battlefield was ravaged and many of his machine parts would scatter around them, leading Sonic to gloat once more, he noticed that as soon as he unceremoniously left, many parts of his fur were a shimmering alabaster, with the very tips of those same quills that were a milky moon white what seemed to be only moments ago turning a pearly pink.

Was it only a mere hallucination? Looking over the footage again

tirelessly, sometimes Sonic was still blue. Or at least, he may have looked like a different shade of blue. A blue that he didn't nearly hate as much because it reminded him of the few siberian squills that would be scattered haphazardly throughout the few natural patches of land around his base, and he never seemed to mind them. He wasn't sure of why, but it surely wasn't because he may have liked them or anything. Who would ever admit to that wholeheartedly? It certainly wasn't going to be him. Glancing and rewinding the footage again, he would appear white again. Rewinding it once more sometimes he even almost appeared as an ivory pink. It even felt that the very same things that he often relied on to be sensible and never be as irrational as the very same humans and Mobians who would look onto the same deities that he himself believed he could never place his faith in to do everything *he* wished for were lying to him, and that somehow hurt more than anything Sonic could've physically done to him, if he truly wished to go that far in their scraps.

Rewind that, Orbot. He looked blue, as usual. *Rewind that again.* Still blue, but there were a few touches of white. Almost like a shimmering nostalgic cornflower blue. *Rewind once more.* The sheen of his fur almost seemed as hot and white as the stars burning in the night sky, with a few brushstrokes of pink from within the edges of himself. *Again.* He was blue again, like the gods originally intended. He questioned if the allergies were becoming too much, or he may have taken a little more of the antihistamines than he should've. It didn't make sense. And it will never make sense. Finally, Eggman allowed Orbot to stop, his eyes shutting off the likeness of Sonic's cocky grin and smile, the doctor wishing he just simply never had to witness it again. But all of them knew that was never going to happen.

"You've seen it, right? That rat just changing colours on the screen whenever he pleased? That's just simply not possible! There must be an explanation! He can't suddenly be granted a new power somehow, can he?"

Even Orbot could sense some distress in his voice, the very same sound that often came out of his master whenever there was a sudden change in his rigorous routine or something simply didn't add up to him in his logical brain. His eyes traced to the date to when the

recordings were done. *March 20th*. What else that happened on March 20th that may be significant? The birth of a Roman poet that carried much of his same likeness, named Ovid? The French emperor Napoleon? Or when a fellow scientific genius like himself submitted his theory of relativity? No, none of these things were all that significant, at least to what was currently happening to him.

He could only think of one other event that often happened on March 20th. What many would consider the very start of the spring equinox, the same sun that often threatened to blind the doctor when he would await that very same meal that Orbot would make for him to only be mocked but yet consumed anyways passing the equator, listening to Mother Nature as it would melt all of the gray ashened piles of snow on the earth and begin to let her veins sprout from her skin.

Was it possible that this was somehow affecting Sonic in this matter? He didn't know much about hedgehogs, and never cared to really do any research on them as he knew Sonic just wasn't a regular *erinaceidae* (always accentuated for Orbot to notice, who dared to correct him that Sonic never even belonged to the same genus as rats and mice) anyways. But he doubt that hedgehogs somehow became a ghastly pink every time the sun crossed the equator. It was simply yet another odd quirk he may have. It was never Shadow who gave them these types of surprises, made him question what he really knew about the same planet that they were all simultaneously inhabiting. Never Amy Rose, who he wasn't sure was even a full-blooded hedgehog anyways. Shadow, for that matter, may have been in that same category, as he was an artificial lifeform created by his grandfather who he still had a lingering respect for despite his crimes against humanity and G.U.N believing he was actually criminally insane. No, it was always Sonic, who stood and retaliated against him since as long as he felt he could remember. And even all throughout those years...he still couldn't solve that puzzle. And nothing made him more annoyed and infuriated than finding a riddle he couldn't solve, let alone those who had much less of a brilliant mind than he did.

Sonic was just a Rubix Cube that Robotnik would sometimes toy with from time to time on his desk whenever he felt he needed a small break from his mechanical machinations, all except someone came

over and tore off some of the stickers from the cube and placed them all to where it would never be resolved, just sitting on the edge of his desk, somehow opposing and mocking him. And he hated that more than anything.

"Orbot. Cubot. Be prepared for tomorrow. I just simply can't stand this anymore. If there's a will, there's a way, and *I will* make sure that Sonic and his imbecilic friends *will* learn that they should still fear me. That rat will learn his place, mark my…"

"*Erinaceidae*, sir."

"If you correct me on what Sonic is one more time, you're going into the scrapheap, got it? I just call him what I feel he really is. Just an annoying, blue rat who needs to be exterminated. Even if he is a different colour."

Another characteristic sigh from Orbot. His master would often threaten to tear him apart whenever he dared to correct him, but he never seemed to follow through with it. Regardless, he kept quiet, letting the doctor continue to mull over their strategy of attack, the entire base soon fading to quiet obscurity, if it wasn't for the many oddly blue-coloured primroses that gathered around the edges of his front gates, Mother Nature following Sonic's derision, taunting him. Or at least, that was how it seemed to be, in his egg-shaped head.

Nothing ever seemed to stay silent for too long, however.

Sakura Blossoms

Chapter Notes

> SLIGHT CW for some blood and violence in this chapter. It's really nothing graphic or anything I feel that warrants a tag for this but figured it was fair enough to give a heads up for that before reading if you really weren't expecting it.

The glowing moonflowers soon turned away from the glare of the sun, unable to transform themselves into their likeness. The forest around them was still, silent. Faint whispers of the wind could be heard in between the fingers of the trees, rumors of something happening that would unsettle the earth. Sonic found himself being awoken by having one of his ears tickled by the wind’s susurrations, saddened, maybe, that what he experienced wasn’t really a dream, and his fur still held the same colour of the many fuchsias he was surrounded by, his fur blending in with the rest of the flowers he supposedly just given birth to.

He was still someone he truly felt he wasn’t. Just a facsimile of the once lost hero the rest of his friends and even many people outside of his social circle depended on, every blue trace of his former identity seized by the same wind, the breath of Mother Nature, and just carelessly tossed aside, never to be seen again. Many have told him he was still the same Sonic they once loved, but even if their words seemed truly sweet and saccharine, they were still hard to believe for himself. His strength was the same. The abilities were still the same. A rose by any other name would still smell just as fragrant as roses were in reality. But to find himself losing further of himself, the flower crown that was once perched proudly on top of his head now only becoming nothing more but a crown of thorns. Placing his fingertips on anything the flowers and trees from within his veins deemed not worthy for the hedgehog to experience from his flesh only becomes punctuated with the prickly stem of a rose, a small droplet of blood dripping from where he felt he previously felt himself a part of something, rooted in something much bigger than himself.

He felt he couldn’t dare to coax himself into stroking the face of his twilight-coloured lover from within the fields of thistles he sprung,

fearing he would prick him and make him hurt and bleed as much as he was, scant lines of red painting the barks of the tree, like faint warnings for anyone who dared to traverse the forest as well, looking for them.

All the flora and fauna around them remained still. The wind whistled. Even if everything was peaceful despite Sonic's inner turmoil, the hero still couldn't rid himself of the feeling that there were a pair of sinister eyes gazing directly at them, coldly analyzing every movement they did, scrutinizing every breath that flowed into Sonic's lungs, patiently biding for their time to strike. Sonic wasn't sure if he was truly being paranoid, but these senses rarely lied to him.

Walking away from his sleeping beauty, careful to try not to make a sound, it didn't take long for Sonic's sheer impatience from having his body not match with how quickly his thoughts would dart through his head, abruptly snapping on a few scattered twigs, the crackling sound enough to rouse Shadow awake. Shadow was just as vigilant as Sonic, his ears fully erect, the feeling of those same sinister oculars following every stir and rustle the two hedgehogs made, intangible yet still as real as the nettles that would nearly coil and choke Sonic's fingertips, the brittle thorns close to scarring yet more of the hero's hands.

"Where are you going?" Shadow asked him.

It was a question he often asked him. Sonic was just as elusive to him as finding that supposed fourth Chaos Emerald he was searching for for years. Appearing often like an electric blue phantasm, once Shadow would lay his scarlet eyes upon him that very same phantasm would disappear like the blue cindered smoke in the air that Shadow could smell from within his nostrils, the scent reminiscent of campfire. He felt he was the only other creature on this planet who could miraculously be able to catch up with Sonic's speed, yet he was always within arm's reach of being able to touch him, just to have him vanish with nary a trace for him to remember him by.

Even if Sonic felt he was losing more of what made him himself, upon hearing Shadow's voice he remained as still as the trees and flowers around them, expectant that the silence they were bathed in would never last as long as they always believed. He allowed himself to stay, for him.

"Goin' for a run. That's all. You don't have to worry about me all the time, ya know."

"I don't have to," Shadow said. "I know you can take care of yourself."

"Then why ask? Not like I need t' tell you anyways. There'll be a trail of flowers wherever I run to. Just follow them and you'll find out where I've been anyways."
He wasn't sure why Sonic was standoffish to him, as if offended that Shadow simply wanted to know why he was leaving him again.

"I wasn't going to follow you. I just…"

A lone leaf scattered from the wind exhaling once more. The sounds it made as it scurried aimlessly about throughout the throat of the woods was the only sound they could register inside their minds. The gazing eyes remained too, unwavering.

"I didn't want you to leave," Shadow said.

And why not? Sonic couldn't help to himself but think. After all, he didn't feel he was the same Sonic that Shadow ended up irrevocably in love with over time since they first met, but a Sonic that had emptied himself of any usefulness he felt he still had for all of his friends and loved ones. This Sonic carried the same name, yet wasn't at all like the fragrant roses that gathered around them, his head beginning to hurt as he felt their thorns were scraping and scratching his consciousness from within his skull.

Sonic sighed, much like the wind that the hero once felt he was much like, what seemed to be only forever ago to his memories. It didn't matter if Shadow actually accepted him or not, he felt. He couldn't rid himself of the feeling that someone else was here with them, purely uninvited to their own private party. It was only natural he had to check for himself whether his preconceived notions were true, no matter how silly they seemed to be.

“Sure, I’d stay and chat, but I can’t shake off the feeling that someone is here. I’m just scoping the area out, and then coming back, if that’s what you really want.”

“If you’re asking me what I really want then, then I’ll come with you.”

Shadow knew he didn’t have to plead for Sonic to remain with him among the elm trees and the roses and narcissus flowers that sprouted from his footsteps, as he couldn’t argue with Sonic’s abrupt impulse to run, the alleged foreboding eyes feeling just as prevalent from within Shadow’s heart and mind as well, even if they didn’t have constant roses of many different colours emerging from within them. And there was no argument from Sonic either. Four eyes were obviously much better than two.

Shadow ran one way, Sonic the other, with hawthorns and forsythias trailing behind in his path. Despite the many sounds of their rushing steps, the forest was still silent, the vibrant odes of the robins that always flew whenever spring arose empty and solemn. The frogs and koi that lived in the ponds he often saw Big fishing in were absent. Absconded, too, were the many seemingly microscopic chipmunks that darted across the forest floor that was blanketed thickly by their leaves. Even though Sonic was breathing a new kind of vibrant life from within the forest, it was as if the rest of nature left them behind, deceased as the wind inhaled fully into the Earth Mother’s body, then back out again, nothing remaining.

All except for Shadow, who kept close to Sonic as they ran, his fur the same shade of vividly pink carnations hard for the formidable lifeform to miss, especially with him clashing with the scintillating green leaves that sheltered them from both the drizzling rain and the piercing sunlight, the dazzling diamonds of light silhouetting against the earth they were standing on. He couldn’t help but sense it was all peculiar, him acting this way towards Sonic. Even if there was a good chance of something foreboding being in the same space as them, ready to lash out at both of the hedgehogs like an enraged viper, he couldn’t let that stubborn competitiveness that was still in him wither out. As if it was a flower that Sonic touched with his newly imbued pink thumb, anything that Sonic would simply do would just make it

grow and flourish even more, wanting to keep pushing him to be better. Better than what he already was, which to Shadow, may as well have been perfect, especially with the considerable scent of lavenders that his nose could unmistakably identify, Sonic once more thinking of him even if he felt he couldn't.

As they barreled through more of the forest, the faster their legs pumped up to match with each other's speed, the brighter the leaves became, the sun's gentle venerable hands only making the chlorophyll from within their flesh only become more apparent, the star-like fingertips seemingly matching the vigil of the night sky from what only felt too long ago, at least inside Sonic's mind. Even if they knew they couldn't appreciate the tranquility of their surroundings, the beauty around them was just as prevalent as the beauty that Shadow felt still remained in Sonic, even underneath different flesh. That bravado and cockiness, even if painted with a different shade of watercolours, was still there, Sonic sensing his lover skating faster wherever the zinnias lied, his iconic chuckles escaping from his lips.

"If all you really wanted was a race Shadow all you had to do was ask!"

Shadow swore he could catch a glimpse of a few lavender petals escaping from his eyelids as he winked at him, before he would dissipate like cinders into the wind, a rosy pink light blazing through the wavering trees. It never took much from Shadow to ignite their rivalry that reflected the first time they met, Sonic not even glancing at that same emerald he showcased his abilities with and instead focusing onto his eyes that burned brightly like embers, unable to let go. Even if he wouldn't recognize his own legendary visage in the mirror, he would never let go. Even if he thought he was no longer himself anymore, he would never let go. Even if Shadow for some reason would never return those same feelings he grew to have for him over the years, he felt he still couldn't let go.

Shadow followed the tears of lavenders, onto the path of oleanders and honeysuckle that would float through the air around his vision. Shadow followed them up many hills, the very same hills that became

punctuated by forget-me-nots, making sure that they would never truly be forgotten in his fading memories. They would soon quickly forget the main reason Sonic felt that he had to run as the lifeform would relentlessly chase after those same sprouted petals he grew to love and appreciate almost more than Sonic himself, both of them feeling the stirring of the earth from within their limbs. The sensation was impeccable and prevalent from within Sonic's blood, his heart often feeling at one with nature's as it would beat alongside his, their organs may as well be considered one and the same. Shadow blinked as he reached the very edge of the woods, sensing the wind kissing his muzzle as he pursued the scintillating rose-coloured hedgehog, wondering if it was the stirring of nature's breath, or Sonic gracing his lips before his brain could truly recognize his surroundings. He would've thought the former if it wasn't for yet another twig of a lavender dripping from his mouth, Sonic transforming himself to become more adventurous, his tongue affectionately brushing against his own, at least for a few scant milliseconds.

Those few milliseconds were unequivocally precious to Shadow. But it always seemed foolish to believe anything that was irretrievably precious to him would truly last forever. It only felt as if a few more milliseconds would weep onto Shadow's devilish quills, the same sun that pierced through the green veil of the forest to guide their path concealed by oppressive silver clouds, a slight roar of some unknown thunderous creature soaring through the sky. The wind blew harshly, crying onto their cheeks with scant traces of rain dampening their muzzles. The world around them seemed metallic; cold. In milliseconds, almost as quick as Sonic could run, the world changed around them, the eyes that once watched them with ill-boding intentions only becoming more prevalent; bigger. The sounds of scraping steel as the protracted slender claws of the dragon would etch above them, the sensation that they were never truly alone only becoming stronger, prevalent, much like the narcissus that gathered profusely. They swallowed the torrent of rain as the dragon roared once more, greedily gulping all of the sky's offerings to the earth below greedily and amiably with gusto.

The world that was once spilled with only a vivid emerald green paint upon its canvas was now drowning, many puddles simultaneously appearing around them, the silver sky's reflection shining on its surface. The many finches that took refuge in the tree's fingers flew

off, unknown to where they may have flew off to. Shadow's ears reverberated with the familiar sound of metal, its skin no doubt rusting upon the tears coming from the sky.

Shadow knew Sonic was still running, the many trails of narcissi still prevalent to his vision and the wet mossy ground they were now standing on, but he couldn't help but sense something foreboding, ugly in the air, something that not at all matched the vibrancy and beauty of their environment. No, it was something that hoped to choke all of that out of nature's breath, all in the name of human advancement. An advancement that was never truly needed, as they never truly appreciated anything they were even given in the first place, whether it was by a maniacal genius, or God himself.

Steel grated against tree bark. Iron against scattered, torn apart flower petals. Cold, unfeeling metal against something that was very much alive, its veins and heart slit and ripped with very little care on how loud the earth would scream for its abuser to stop, to only be met with a wicked grin and yet more steely tendrils to reach out for wherever her voice came from, to no longer hear the wanton, shrill screams of the earth, just begging for all of the hurt that throbbed in her blood to stop.

Shadow, unfortunately, knew that wicked grin from anywhere. And so would Sonic, even with his eyes covered with buttercups, unable to see, yet be able to feel all of the negative emotions that seep from that same maniacal smirk of his.

"Where is he? Where is that blue rat? I'm going to put a stop to all of this flowery nonsense of his!"

The voice was all too familiar. Sinister, yet carrying an oddly goofy overtone. As if this very same supervillain they constantly fought against also had a part-time job of being a disgruntled clown at children's birthday parties, whether the child really wanted him or not.

Guess to Shadow, that feeling was mutual.

"Why *would* you want him, Doctor? Don't you realize he'll just stop

you like always? Even I can defeat you with one hand tied behind my back."

The Doctor snarled. "This isn't about you. You're not the one growing flowers everywhere you go, triggering my allergies! This is only between me and Sonic, got it?"

Shadow could only respond with a scoff, and as per usual, a snarky comeback akin to what Sonic would often say. "Good thing I often have a hard time listening to authority then."

Ever since his countless battles with an alleged rodent who could run at the speed of sound, Eggman's reaction times were nearly as breakneck fast as his, the metallic claw of his Egg Arachnid, shielding himself from Shadow's spindash assault. His quills unable to even make a dent on its legs, his feet slid against the muddied ground, the side of a tree's bark stopping him from moving any further from the locomotive beast in front of him.

"You probably should, Shadow. After all, many who find themselves not listening to authority usually end up getting hurt. And you *certainly* don't want to get hurt in the crossfire when none of this involves you, hmm?"

Another wretched sound screeching in Shadow's ears. The metallic limbs of his newly built machine skittered and lumbered on, mimicking much of the same movements an actual spider would make, except the very tips of his limbs were sharp, serrated enough to not only pull apart the green earth that Eggman claimed he so hated, but to slice any of the flowers that grew in a much-too-clean row around him, in defiance of everything Sonic seemingly did around him.

The noise was so much worse to Shadow's ears, being biologically engineered to be able to hear much akin to a cat, a pin dropped 10 yards away from him never going unnoticed. All thanks to Ivo's grandfather, whom the doctor still couldn't help but not want to tear apart his work, even if he was in the way of his ultimate goal.

"Anything that involves Sonic at this point also involves me. If you'd

like to get rid of him just because he's triggering your allergies you have to go through me first."

Another snarl and snort from the doctor. Shadow couldn't tell if it was because he was starting to get infuriated or the flowers were really flaring up his said allergies. "Right, I almost forgot. Both of you decided to…" He at least attempted to find the right words. "...tie the knot together. I guess it's fair that I attempt to kill you too."

"We haven't 'tied the knot' yet Doctor, we…"

Before Shadow could officially correct him, he could feel a sliver of a cut being enacted on his muzzle, Eggman's limbs that cut like shrapnel narrowly missing Shadow completely.

If anything, he should be fortunate that the Doctor couldn't see with all of the honeysuckle floating around them, as even one momentary distraction like that may as well could've cost Shadow his life.

"You should know that I really don't care for semantics at this time, Shadow. All I know is that I may as well take care of you both, if you wish to shove your nose into matters that aren't yours so much."

With yet another stab onto the earth, Shadow sidestepped away from his assault quickly, a spark of a flame igniting from his hoverboots. It didn't take much to have him dash across the fields much like his partner Sonic, only without the many flowers that would soon sprout from within his footprints, if he ever truly allowed himself to touch the ground.

His quills and speed serrating through the breeze, he attempted to strike against the center of the mechanical arachnid's body again, to only be protected by its sharp limbs again, the impact from the force of his blow causing a small cut on Shadow's body again. He knew it was nothing, as his body regenerated insignificant wounds like this much quicker than the human body, but yet there was an innate rage he couldn't help but experience whenever his enemies managed to make him see his own blood on the ground. Whenever they managed to remind him his own blood wasn't like anyone else's that was on the Earth, he claimed they now made it personal to him.

Yet another spark would burst from his fingertips, a phosphorescent neon green light, appearing jagged and edged much like a knife,

pointed directly against Robotnik's machine. Holding it akin to a lance, he could hear the the slight sizzling sounds it would make as the raindrops would kiss upon its body, white hot with both the large amounts of Chaos energy embedded in his soul and his own anger. He would discharge it against Eggman's machine, to only find his metallic limbs would absorb most of the brunt of his said anger, only burning the surface of one of his arachnid legs, singed with a corrosive black.

Eggman's robots didn't bleed, yet seeing one of his machine's legs become a mostly unsightly black, somehow only angered the doctor further, similar to Shadow's fury on having a just as unsightly cut on his muzzle that was being cleaned and soothed by the rain that was now downpouring from the heavens above them.

His latest creation still functioned, but to have something ugly, a scratch or a scorch on its body? Eggman just wouldn't stand for it.

"Making a mark on my latest machine? How dare you! Maybe after I'm done tearing you apart you would actually start listening to authority in those last few seconds of your life before I make the final cut!"

As if he was blinded by fury, he used many of the machine's tendrils to strike at Shadow, to only miss, Shadow's speed much too quick for their lumbering machinations. While his Chaos Spear did create a mark on his creation, it wasn't enough, the steel-clad body feeling like the impenetrable walls of Jericho. It was evident with every plant life that Eggman felled by his robot's own hands his aim was only becoming more accurate, his vision more clear without the obtrusive cloud of pollen that would constantly blind and reduce him to a sniveling mess. Shadow would only coax the robot further into the woods, in hopes that he would be able to find an opening in Eggman's defenses, the honeysuckle and other floating pollen around them only becoming more oppressive as they ran further into the forest's depths.

At least, momentarily. In as quick as Shadow would blink, Eggman would only cut and destroy yet more plant life that was around in his vicinity in a blind rage, realizing that the only reason he was even doing this was just an attempt to bide him more time, to see if Sonic would finally realize what was going on and help him, wherever he was. Shadow wasn't even sure if he was even in the forest anymore, believing that he was still in pursuit of him to win their "race". Not that it mattered anymore. But even in the middle of a supposed crisis,

Sonic still couldn't attempt to stop himself in the middle of a competition.

That stupid hedgehog...where is he? Who cares if he's faster than me? At least, not when Eggman could kill me and have him not even notice because he's too busy gloating his meaningless victory over me…

Abruptly silencing his own thoughts came another laceration to his cheeks, yet another sliver of yellow-green blood dripping that was soon cleaned by the rain. Shadow would leap away from yet another blind onslaught from the doctor, finding it harder to keep his grip on the ground with the copious slick mud that bubbled around the earth's surface from the relentless rain, his shoes not offering much traction to prevent him from sliding onto yet another bark of a tree, his back splintered by their rough surfaces and from the thorns of the mahogany roses that rose around them earlier. Even attempting to dash around Eggman's machine was becoming difficult, his boots slipping and dragging him much further than where he needed to be to attack Eggman directly, his needle-like limbs able to shield him from anything Shadow wished to do to him.

His ears fully erect, swiveling to hopefully hear yet another rush of footsteps dashing towards him, the only sounds evident to him were his hurried breathing, the shrill screech of the Egg Arachnid lunging towards him, and the rain that pelted against his body, along with the subtle growls of the thunderous monsters that lived in the sky. It was obvious that Eggman's weak point was at the very center of his machine, being mostly defenseless if anyone managed to reach him there. But with his powerful, needle-pointed legs able to strike him before Shadow would reach that vulnerable spot of his machine, along with how difficult it was for him to gain a good footing on the ground due to the mud seeping from the unseemly downpour, it was hard for him to see if he could take one of Eggman's robots by himself, even if originally he wasn't even interested in picking a fight with him out of all Sonic's friends and acquaintances. News of both him and Sonic apparently seeing each other and spending more time at his residence just spread that fast that not even the mad, isolated doctor could ignore it.

“It’s a shame that I may have to deliver pieces and parts of your body in a bag addressed to your *boyfriend*, Shadow. All because you just couldn’t let these matters between us be let enough alone. And here I was, even planning on *crashing your wedding…*”

Ironic. The egg-shaped clown scolding him on intruding on his private matters involving only him and Sonic, saying that he was planning on intruding on his own private matters with his lover that happened to carry the same name as his arch nemesis. As if Eggman understood how to leave things be either, with the amount of fallen trees and dessicated flowers rotting in the ground around them, returning themselves to Mother Nature’s veins. Destroying nature all in the name of progress and himself. Killing pretty things unrelated to his own struggles just so he could kill possibly the prettiest thing of all that was supposedly the perpetrator of everything Eggman himself couldn’t stand.

Almost as ironic as rain on their wedding day, if that was supposed to be ironic at all in the slightest.

So much rain came drizzling down, to the extent that the very tips of Eggman’s mechanical limbs began to rust. It was as if the Earth vowed to stop him as well after the many deaths of her fallen children, the mud around them even making it difficult for his robot to maneuver. It didn’t seem enough to really slow him down, but it at least was biding Shadow more time. Another spark of a flame, and Shadow absconded further in the depths of the forest, the very same pinholes of light that once greeted both of the hedgehogs which now seemed forever ago completely overshadowed by the blackened clouds, the mycena illuminating his path. Among the moonflowers and the delphiniums Shadow could catch a glimpse of other flowers in his wake, a sudden growth of narcissus and black dahlia’s foreboding his current predicament. There was even something about their own pollen that even Shadow had to briefly shut his eyes and wince, a scant tear crevassing his face to wash away yet more of his green bleeding wounds.

He would strike again whenever he felt there was an opening in his defenses. A flash of glaring white would crack against the sky, reminiscent of the brimming lightning in the air. Again. Again. He would only be able to inflict a few scratches and nicks on Eggman's tendrils and hull, the machine still running in full capacity. It would be a while before he could recharge his energies, he thought, as he once again swiftly dodged another lunge from his robot's arms, losing his footing as his boots would skid a few feet across from him. The rain wasn't letting up, only drenching the both of them, and most likely Sonic too for that matter, with the heavens only weeping further from everything they were witnessing below them.

As Eggman stabbed yet another growth of a black dahlia, Shadow thought for a brief moment that he saw it bleed, but it very well could've been a trick of his eyes, being exhausted and cold from the frigid rain. It was as if it was weeping too, mourning the loss of its fallen friends. As soon as the Doctor came along, claiming he had to destroy everything around him in the name of only him, it was as if the world to Shadow was only becoming uglier, darker than it all used to be when Sonic showed him the beauty in such ordinary simple things like the flowers that grew around him. There was a blackened, almost bloodied veneer that coated his vision every time he acknowledged Eggman's presence, and he could only feel his own blood begin to seethe and simmer, as if he was destroying the sanctity of everything Sonic gave him that night, only because *he* had to feel included in *their* own lives. Shadow would launch himself harder against him, even his over encumbered machine losing its footing to the unstable wet surface they were both fighting on. Through gritted fangs, he didn't at all care that he wasn't sure where Sonic was. He just wanted the doctor to take his overpriced machines and *leave.* Even if it meant he had to take them apart, limb by limb.

He was blinded by not only fury, but the torrential rain that continued to soak through his fur and quills and even his bones, his lithe body ricocheting off the Egg Arachnid's steel body and registering a throbbing spasm flaring in his back, as his machine knocked him against another massive tree to where even it would crack and splinter slightly from its force, tossing Shadow like a ragdoll as if he was an irritating insect. His quills would absorb most of the impact, but it could do nothing for the pounding ache and indignation he would feel not only from the doctor's retaliation, but the seemingly senseless destruction that lied around them.

His ember-coloured eyes would only see yet more traces of black dahlia's around him. To him, they may as well be the ugliest flowers he's seen. There were far too many of them. Every single one just made their dismal surroundings all the more apparent, Shadow's pupils dilating as they only accentuated his pain further and further. As if they just carried a force field of agony onto Shadow's body.

His bones felt as tired and withered as the fallen delphiniums around him, all the symbols of the big-hearted traits that his lover would carry fading away underneath the spider mech's trampling limbs. Shadow couldn't tell if the dampness on his muzzle was from the rain or his own tears. He simply told himself it was from the rain, if only to make himself feel better, even if it seemed only brief and insignificant if Eggman wished to make an example of him in front of Sonic.

"Strange. We've been fighting for a while and not once has that blue...or should I say, *pink rat boyfriend* of yours hasn't shown up once. Looks like he has bigger priorities than helping you."

Shadow said nothing, his throat feeling thorny and prickled, another sliver of neon green blood coughed up with a lone petal from a mangled black dahlia. He envied Sonic for this exact thing, as sometimes it was better to not say anything to your bitter enemies, only decorating his resentment with the flower that the both of them may as well have hated the most.

Lying there, covered in petals and thorns of the remaining black dahlia's and roses, Shadow winced, hoping to himself that the rain could wash away the pain he felt in the core of his body, immobilized and staggered by the impact of Eggman knocking him backwards. Attempting to scramble back onto his feet, a glint of sterling light would ignite in his vision, the doctor raising one of the spidered limbs high in the darkened skies, as if he was brandishing a knife to plunge deep into Shadow's flowered heart.

"Don't even worry about inviting your idiot friends to your wedding. I'd be more worried about making funeral arrangements once I'm done with you."

With the deluge of rain that exuded from his quills and eyes like tears,

the sudden burst of pollen that inflamed the air around him, and the harshness of the light that emanated from the Egg Arachnid's shimmering body, it was difficult for Shadow to see, feeling distant from his body as the throbbing pain Eggman inflicted on him was very much still there but his brain was rejecting the realness of it, the burning from his scars fading from his mind. He didn't at all consider the possibility that he could die. He couldn't rationalize it. He's fought stronger, tougher enemies than Robotnik, yet he was struggling. Was it simply because he allowed his emotions to get the better of him at this moment? The sickening repulsiveness of the black dahlia's around him, along with the rejection he felt that Sonic never came to his aid? Even with the razor-sharp shrapnel close to his jugular, a dwelling thought remained in his head, that he knew he wasn't going to die. There was a brief stirring in his veins, Shadow opening his lids fully to truly immerse himself in this mess he got himself into. The filthiness of the mud that coated his legs thoroughly from their battle, the blood red roses and dahlia's that precipitously ascended around him, the piercing frigidity of the rain that drenched his entire body as he lied there, washing away the sharp contrasting colours of his blood as more of his life seeped onto the earth. Despite all of this, Shadow would only watch intently not on the doctor preparing to deliver the final blow onto him, but on a lone raindrop somehow morphing and materializing to a pink cherry blossom that would flit and dance in the air, before gracefully landing on Shadow's cut cheek, the wound healing as if he was kissed by God.

Shadow said nothing. He would only smirk, much as Sonic would if he found himself in the same predicament, even in brief moments before his death.

"What? *What? The hell* you think is so funny, Shadow? You're not one to smile right before someone ends your miserable existence. If anything, you're just reminding me of a certain…"

Shadow lifted one of his palms in the air, pointing directly to something he knew Eggman couldn't see. Before the mad doctor could get a clear answer to Shadow's sudden personality shift, his arthropod machine would bend over from a sudden swift smite, scrambling to lift itself up after what he could only feel was the sky rupturing apart and deciding to take matters into its own hands, a barbed singeing lightning strike slicing through his sensibilities and body.

Instead of rain, Shadow could only smile, as he was now being

covered in cherry blossoms, a sight that was far more prettier than the many roses and dahlia's whose vines had a chokehold on him, their tendrils slithering away as if ashamed of everything they did unto Shadow.

He looked up. The clouds were parting slightly, a crack erupting in the dark guise of the tumultuous skies. A few glaring rays of sunlight would break through the surface, gently stroking upon the hybrid's face.

He continued to smile, as if delirious, unsure if everything he was experiencing was even grounded in the same reality he was familiar with, all of his given life.

"What took you so long, faker?"

Emerging from the same murky shadows of the woods Shadow was wrapped in, Sonic's radiant pearly colour conflicted with the rest of the shades of the world that all of them were in, Eggman seeing for himself the proof of Sonic's supposed new powers. As he stood valiantly against the struggling mechanical beast, shielding Shadow from not only its aggression but from the rain that bit his bones with its icy touch, replacing them with petals that reminded Shadow of the colours of the encroaching dawn that would shatter the night sky. A new beginning. A renewal. A sudden burst of vitality that would swarm in not only his fingertips but his heart, flowering into a beautiful vibrant crocus.

"I'm sorry Shads. I sort of...just got held up by my own thoughts, then realized...that none of it really mattered, especially right now."

The doctor would blink, as if he was unsure if what he was seeing in Sonic was truly real. He would only blink again, the sudden burst of poplar and sakura petals only triggering his allergies once again, sniveling as he brushed his tears away, almost infuriating him as much as it did when Shadow witnessed his own blood streaming forth from his own body.

"Oh, you're finally here, after I was about to make mincemeat of your beloved boyfriend here? If you arrived a second later, you surely would've been *too slow* to save him. You just love to take your sweet time before your scheduled appointment with me…"

“I don’t even care to hear about what you’re plannin’ or how brilliant your new plan is, Egghead. If you want to get your planned beating done and over with, I’ll make sure to scramble your eggbrains before you even know what’s hittin’ ya.”

With a rosy petal brushing against the doctor’s eyes, a sliver of tears seeping from them, him unable to tell whether it really was his blooming allergies from Sonic’s arrival or the tear that was drenching all of them thoroughly, allowing the emerging tendrils of the Lilies of the Valleys drink from the heavens.

“And what a lovely colour you have on you, hedgehog. I didn’t know pink would even complement you, but I guess no matter what, despite all the odds, you manage to always surprise me.”

It was just as much of a surprise for both of them to hear that coming from the doctor himself. Almost as if it was a genuine compliment on Sonic’s new appearance that he still couldn’t find himself feeling as if he was still the self he’s always known since he’s opened his eyes as a hoglet, the one that he’s always known to bear cobalt blue fur that would glare indignantly into Eggman’s vision, as if he was only born with one purpose, and that was to simply stop anyone that threatened the very same earth that had much of the same colouration as him.

Even from glancing at himself from a distance, in his mind’s eyes, he still wasn’t entirely sure how he felt about fighting in a body that may as well not even be his, even if the silver branches of the cherry blossom trees were rising from his quills and head as if they were arterial antlers, every finger from the trees that grew and flourished from his own courageous, selfless thoughts were emulsified and delineated out onto their canvas, a valiant pink and sterling crown that emboldened his head. Shadow’s large pupils would soon be reduced to their ordinary size, momentarily blinded by the scintillating glare of his rose-coloured quills, the brief scars of God’s rays displaying everything that Sonic was once ashamed of, to only let it all scatter away into the wind like the rest of the sakura petals that dripped and rose to be licked and tasted by the salient sunlight.

Like his namesake, Shadow wanted to have Sonic’s brilliance cast him away, but never too far. Remaining close to his side, following every movement he would make as the sun would dapple on his body, much

like the pinholes of light from the tree's leaves and hands guiding them all through their late night conversations in these very same woods that Sonic would kiss onto it new life, an illuminating growth of mycena mushrooms and the moonflowers that would mimic the very same porcelain gaze and glow of the godly moon herself. It was almost as if Shadow didn't seem to care all that much, at least not anymore, of having his rival faster and speedier than him, if it meant he could be on the very same path he was running in, breathing the same florid air as him, their hearts in sync as they traversed and shared much of the same emotions, the same experiences that would keep them close together. Allowing themselves to be a part of the same promise they both kept to protect their planet, even if both of them had their own differing reasons on why they felt they must.

Shadow stood up. He staggered slightly, his body still sore and splintered from the doctor's careless launch, but as if he was miraculously revitalized, he was standing as tall as Sonic, though his glimmering amaranth quills would only make stretch and be cast over the cold horizon, the ivory touches of nature only unraveling themselves further to the doctor's agnostic eyes.

There was no scientific reason to why anything occurred around them. No matter if Sonic even thought it would be a good use of their time to even attempt to explain to him how all of this happened, how Sonic couldn't even believe in any of it himself, but it was happening, and every single individual who seemed entangled in this very same web of branches and blushing petals that were rising from the hedgehog's head accepted that it was still him, and it was all happening as clearly as Sonic saw it.

"*These things usually never bothered you, Sonic. And it's not bothering me. You're still my friend whether you're blue, pink, purple, green, it doesn't matter!*"

"*But you always looked on the bright side of things. You taught me that. And now, I think you need to practice what you preach.*"

"I think they're beautiful, Mr. Sonic."

After a while, Sonic had to glance at his sudden radiant growth around him, the bursts of vibrant vivid newly birthed pink snapdragons that clutched and ensnared themselves around the Egg Arachnid's rusted and bloodied limbs and body, every slice and incision the doctor would inflict on Sonic's sanctimonious garden only making every flower and plant only become stronger, more heads sprouting like a hydra, their heads hissing their pistiled tongues in disdain and wrath. There was something about it that Sonic couldn't help but admit that he was starting to find beauty in all of this, in another side of himself that he like everything he grew and flourished around him, was starting to accept and appreciate.

Because like with all beautiful things in life, you never knew how precious it truly was in your life until it scattered away into the wind, like the many fallen sakura petals that were only replacing the rain that sobbed from the skies, signaling the world around them, Mother Nature, was starting to heal from all of the turmoil that pained and wounded her.

"You're still Sonic. You're still you."

The golden paint that sealed and beautified every crack and fracture that remained in Sonic's body and soul, to only have a sudden surge of white roses that would bleed from his wrists, it accentuated his flaws, yet it made him much more...him. Something that was so obvious to his friends and lover, the masking buttercups only blinding him from such a remarkable truth. It was him. It was all him. He was just as beloved, even in a different palette of colours, even with all of the peonies, peppermints, magnolias, blueberry bushels, fully unfurled lotus flowers, lilies, poppies, moonflowers, and primroses that marked and painted his lifestream. The cirrus of every flower and lovely tree that he could remember by name encroached and burst onto the earth anew, the many plants Eggman ripped apart in shameless fury and indignation swiftly replaced with something brighter and more wonderful, the muddy ground underneath his feet hardening onto damp, fertile soil, where the many bones and blood of brave fallen heroes slept underneath.

“Pink or blue, it doesn’t matter. You’re still Sonic and you will always be Sonic. Through and through…”

It didn’t matter which flower would rise from every slow, steady step he would direct towards Eggman, who continued to writhe and struggle from the rapid overgrowth that was overriding every thought and engine inside his carefully constructed machine, its shrill sirens and beeps crying out for a logical explanation to why its body was refusing to work. Even with the doctor’s evident frustration, he could only say nothing and be just as helpless as his creation, most of his senses torn away from Sonic’s newfound oppressive green thumb. He had to remind himself that it wasn’t possible for stitches and embroidered piercing thistles to overtake his lungs, Eggman coughing and gagging for any relief from the sakura-scented air around him, the thorns scratching and scarring his throat and tonsils.

There was no sound, not even a single taunt from Sonic, as his eyes gazed at him unblinking, with no hatred or contempt, but rather, almost as if there was another stirring of something else in Sonic, reminding Ivo of those many nonsense and ridiculous stories of others becoming possessed by spirits and finding themselves losing all control of their consciousness. The very same emerald eyes that complemented Sonic’s ocean-blue hue, as if he captured the soul and vivacity of the very same green hills that he was born and raised in, were marked a similar shade of cinnabar as Shadow’s own. The same colour of the blood that swam and strengthened almost every soul that thrived on this planet, the rosy crown of cherry blossom, poplar, and magnolia petals almost appearing as wide as the rising carmine sun behind them, almost as if it was crevassing and crowning the skies and galaxies that glittered and accentuated the very same beauty that both Sonic and Shadow were enamoured and surrounded by.

“Eventually, people notice those good deeds, and how much you’re actually trying to improve the world around you. They soon see how much better you’re making the world just by...being alive…”

Every inhale that went inside Sonic's lungs was as if he was drinking in all of the stars that weren't fully blanketed by the clouds above them, every raindrop that collected on the dewy, rainbow-gleamed grass that survived the storm's onslaught, vivifying every carnation, cherry petal and twist of lavender that wrapped and coiled around his wrists, the same countenance still staring unflinchingly against Eggman, the rosy hedgehog continuing to say nothing, but letting his own life and blood he was shedding onto his world letting them speak for him, just as unflinchingly as his gaze was.

His arachnid machination entirely unable to move from the overgrowth of vines and other plants drowning it in nature, there were times where even someone who allegedly had a genius IQ of 300 knew that some things simply weren't worth salvaging, and that even he couldn't win in some battles, even if he did everything his own godlike diligent hands could reasonably do. Hastily finding the escape hatch he installed on his robot comrade just in case such an unlikely, but still quite likely, scenario would arrive when he knew that it was every man for himself, and he wasn't going to waste such a brilliant brain on a pointless, unwinnable endeavour such as this. If there was at least one thing he wasn't going to give Sonic, it was having him and his just as irritating boyfriend rat witness him grovelling on the ground, his sinuses from the swarming primroses flared and making him cry and snivel.

God, it didn't help that those same primroses that were now consuming his robot like a horde of hungry savage animals were exactly the same shade of blue that Sonic used to be...before who knew what happened to him that made him this way, making him the very same shade of pink as the torrent of sakura petals that embellished the forest around him.

Though Sonic and Shadow didn't seem interested in ending the doctor's life, there was an innate fear that Eggman couldn't shake that invigorated him to run in a speed that even the blue streak would be impressed by. His feet somehow ignoring the fact how it would be reasonably difficult for the overweight professor to traverse and sprint through many rugged patches and suffocating overgrowth of pink dahlia's and carnations, he didn't seem to much care for the pain that

shot through his legs and feet, his heart shuddering from the very cold glance Sonic gave him as his robot succumbed to his seemingly celestial abilities, a glance that was...familiar, Robotnik surmised. Not at all a familiar glance that Sonic would give him, even in throughout all of their countless battles and strifes.

He could still see the many branches and throbbing vivacious silver hands dusted with cotton candy-like fluff from all of the sakura petals that cascaded down in the distance, the doctor unable to tell how far he exactly ran in what almost felt like those last few seconds. But it didn't matter, even if this was something he could eventually brag about to Orbot and Cubot later, those two dumbbots warning him that if he didn't at least follow some sort of exercise regiment he may as well could end up being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. His disgruntled annoyance at having his own creations he could take the credit in giving them life like Mother Nature herself be just overall concerned about his health and well-being didn't at all matter.

Those eyes. He couldn't at all brush away the look of Sonic's eyes. It was familiar, to something he once read about back in his college days when he was studying to get a doctorate's degree before he had the ingenious idea of taking matters into his own hands and making the world his very own molded shape and brilliant sheen, relentlessly chasing after a blasted blue hedgehog would always foil his plans time and time again. While the colour of his eyes were similar to Shadow's, he knew it simply wasn't that. Or maybe little did he know his grandfather would take inspiration from it when he decided to create his very own artificial lifeform. It was the very same eyes that he took a careless glance at one day while buried in his studies, a random page unfurling about both Japanese and Buddhist mythology.

Yatsukamizuomitsuno. A deer-like creature with many branches and twigs collecting on its solemn head like antlers, using his powers to branch together both the Japanese lands of Izumo, Kizuki, Sada, Kurami, and Miho, the very tools he would use to piece together the entire nation becoming looming mountainsides and wave-crested coastlines. A long-forgotten god only told in Shinto folklore.

Would it explain the opulent plant life that bled and swarmed with

every step of his feet? And having these said plants somehow gain a consciousness, some sentience that would put his creations on the same brain waves and cognizance as the small animals that would swarm around his abandoned, rusted machine, taking over what was originally rightfully theirs? The wavering soul of the one blue rat he's known for over a decade, suddenly leaving his body and having eyes that just burned with an unparalleled passion at the injustice the doctor committed to his own lifeforms, the ignited arduous flames of godlike redemption?

It didn't matter what the answer was, because he knew it was going to sound just as silly and incredulous as the existence of a blue hedgehog that was able to run in lightspeeds that seemingly burst into his life for no other reason but to smite and punish him. Nothing really ever made sense since the very beginning of their rivalry. And it was something that even the doctor himself found it hard to accept still, even after the thousandth mechanical creature of his he mangled and tore apart right in front of him.

Sometimes, it just seemed pointless to look for an answer. It was just better to accept the world as it was, even if there were many parts of it that Ivo didn't like.

As he sprinted away from the forest, his chest dramatically puffed out to catch his breath that was now running faster than him, he took care not to trample any of the lavender-tinted roses that now crowned the entrance of the woods, even finding that he thought they were too pretty to smash apart so carelessly like he often did with the rest of nature. They were left immaculate; untouched, kissed by the tender breeze of the wind that would soon blow in Sonic's direction.

Shadow looked on, in both cautious curiousity, and reverent awe. There was something about Sonic's new appearance that he found alluring and even celestial, but gazing upon him, there was something more radiant about his scintillating rose quartz-coloured fur as the

emerging white sun shone on him, almost blinding him the more he blindly stared at him. An endless stream of cherry blossoms drifted from his crowned, proud head, the world around them looking as vibrant and pink as his lover did. It reminded Shadow, almost, of freshly fallen snow on a silver cold day in November. It even gathered in piles around their feet, almost seeming to swallow them entirely in the resurgence of the beauty and love of springtime. Its touch wasn't at all cold, but warm and refreshing, the scent of newly birthed petals that gave them the reassurance that they were just as alive as the fields of flowers that stretched on endlessly for what may as well be thousands of miles around them, in love with being given yet another chance to appreciate the beauty of the very nature that Sonic swore to protect ever since he sprouted like a white rose from the earth.

"Sonic."

He wouldn't say anything, but only turn his head to Shadow's direction briefly, before acknowledging him with a smile.

The hybrid's heart would stop, if only for half a second, a tint of green similar to the tree's leaves that sequestered them from the rest of the sky whose tears were only slight silver slivers painting his face. From responding to his name, he knew he was there, he was always there, but there was something in him that was wholly new and re splendent about Sonic now. A truly gorgeous rose that was now in full bloom. One that Sonic didn't even have a hand in growing himself with these divine powers of his. It was Shadow that tirelessly tended to and watered and nurtured this lovely rose of his that was irrevocably his. His and his alone.

"Hey Shadow. Lovely day we're having, aren't we?"

Shadow wasn't sure if he was being his snarky self, with the rain that while was becoming weaker the more the sun shone its godly rays on both of their drenched bodies but still made the ground almost entirely submerged with puddles that were becoming sealed and blanketed by the fallen petals that gravitated between the both of them. But looking on the aftermath of Eggman's wreckage, it was soon fading and dissolving almost as quick as the time it took for Sonic to best him once again, the forest around them making a swift recovery.

The rosy petals continued to amass around them. A rejuvenating

winter that didn't make the rest of the flora and fauna hide away and sleep until the sun was forgiving and gregarious again.

Witnessing all of this with his blessed eyes, Shadow could only return to Sonic with a pleasant smile of his own.

"Yes. Yes it is."

The artificial lifeform's ears would spring to life like with all of the lovely pastel roses that would burst in their own personal lively garden. A sunny chirp would come out of Sonic, almost as bright as the very sun that graced them. Then his iconic chuckles. Then he would burst into laughter along with the lavender roses, his orchid body flourishing with mirth with yet more lovely music for Shadow's ears to be kissed with.

"Now, where were we before we were so *rudely interrupted* by that dumb egghead?"

They would soon return home, but not before Sonic and Shadow would frolic and play with all the renewed beauty that seeped into their vision around them, reminiscent of a child experiencing tumbling down in their very first gathered pile of fallen leaves, with exuberant mirth and wonder at every sakura petal that swarmed around them. Falling deep into every hill of pink around them, they fell deeper in love, with not only the world and each other, but Sonic himself, accepting every lavender rose that blossomed on their lips and putting them in a vase for Shadow to keep for himself later.

Roses

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Things never remained still for too long.

Nature followed that principle possibly more than anything else in the world.

As time would wane by, the hot silver sun would only get closer to the earth, the land becoming scorched and the seas would nearly boil and seam at its touch. It wouldn't be much longer until the sun would be pulled further and further apart from its throne, the days holstering winds that would bite and nip at bones and branches that shook from its touch, the trees becoming as red and gold as blood and honey, until they would soon be blanketed by glistening snow, its feel and touch much more different than all of the blossoms that bloomed from Sonic's proud, renewed crown. Seasons came and went. And often, they would just be as beautiful as the last time they would emerge, the scents, sights, and memories just as vivid as they were the last time they were seen.

So why should things always remain the same? The wonderful things in life were never truly all that wonderful until you knew they could vanish just as quickly as they appeared, demanding to be cherished as if you viewed them with a child's eyes, to be held close to your heart, truly never letting go.

Nature wasn't the only follower to this rule. People, animals, and by that logic, Mobians too, never remained still for too long either. They would have to grow, their perspectives changing along with the seasons, their bodies and minds either becoming just as brittle as the once verdant tall stalks of a withered sunflower, or stronger, able to adapt to the ever-changing tides of life, and accepting the world and the many odd, wondrous things that would happen as they are.

There were many viral photos and videos of the vast fields of flowers that began to rise around Station Square, even in areas where it once believed that flowers couldn't rise and flourish in at all, such as outside of a fractured crack in the middle of a concrete sidewalk, a slender daisy smiling at the travelers who would take care not to trample it and allow it to be. Rare species of flowers that would normally not appear in their side of the world being found in the most mundane of places, such as pink pearl agastaches colouring the red barren roadsides of the city to become more vivacious, and Himalayan poppies being sighted growing strongly around, strangely enough, anywhere that supposedly sold a good chili dog.

Unfortunately, like all pretty things, flowers soon had to die too, and it was a phenomenon that environmentalists knew would most likely never happen again, the only thing that would never wither away would be the memories of all of the city's citizens who were lucky enough to witness it.

Tails scrolled through yet another timeline full of posts from people capturing photos of all of the flowers they would find, smiling. It was a breath of fresh air from all of the turmoil and arguments that would often appear in his algorithms, whether he really asked for it or not. While it may not have been what he was exactly looking for as he did his research, he didn't mind seeing the bright daylight orange glow of a daylily while he looked for yet another solution to an obscure programming hiccup, much to no avail. Well, at least he got to see some pretty pictures and everyone enjoying what may as well have been the fruits of Sonic's own labour.

Inside his workshop, things mostly remained still. Tails preferred it this way. The only thing he knew would never be still was his friend Sonic who often took refuge in a lone bunk bed upstairs, often leaving many of their things a disorganized mess as he would often go out for his daily adventures, a literal blue tornado rampaging through. It was something Tails learned to accept a long time ago, however. To Sonic's credit, he would attempt to clean up his messes to the fox's specifications. Keyword on *attempt* anyways. But sometimes it was

better to take whatever was given to him.

Something didn't feel right to him, however. Things were oddly too still. Much too quiet. While Tails didn't mind it that way, he knew it wasn't the way it was supposed to be. Sonic stayed behind the door to his room much longer than usual. There was nary a sound that came from him. At this point, Tails was privy to having the random assortment of noises Sonic would make around him in order to properly concentrate on his work, so the kit would rise from his seat, trotting over to his door.

He knocked, his knuckles rapping on the wooden frame lightly enough as if to not startle his friend. Nothing.

"Sonic? Are you in there?"

He knocked again, slightly harder. The only sound that Tails would be able to capture from his attentive ears was only a light shuffling, and nothing more.

"Sonic...it's just me, Tails. Is everything all right in there?"

Only more shuffling, as if Sonic was flipping through many discarded papers. There were days where Tails would walk inside, seeing random sheets of notebook paper on the floor full of inane scribbles and seemingly nonsensical words scrawled on them, only making sense for Sonic when he originally wrote them. If he was even inside, he wondered what, exactly, he was doing that would lead to possibly Sonic making this much noise with the amount of pages he possibly had, as if he was attempting to write a novel. The last time Sonic tried to do so he would only give up halfway, bored and frustrated, with a mile of inconsequential notes lying haphazardly on the floor for his friend and apparent housekeeper to find later. Tails sighed, knocking much harder than before, only receiving stark silence as an answer to

his innocent query.

Only yet more shuffling, along with a muffled annoyed grunt. He at least knew Sonic was inside, but the fact that he was ignoring him, not even a simple “go away” or “leave me alone” sufficing, Tails disregarded all the social norms he often would have to adapt to, turning the handle and shoving himself inside.

The shuffling that Tails heard on the other side of the door weren’t from papers, but rather petals that decorated his floor much like the rest of his belongings casually placed in an aimless fashion, bringing some much needed colour among his usual messes. Vibrant verdant vines embroidered his windowsills, the sunlight from outside brightly showcasing the dripping bleeding hearts like pastel paint on a picture frame. However, they were no longer as vibrant as they once were. Like paint, they dripped further onto the seams of the canvas, bleeding onto the edges of Sonic’s personal world. The milky Calla lillies that guarded Sonic’s bedpost at night were no longer as intimidating as they once were, the royal velveted crowns of their spathes wrinkled, worn, and decayed. Even the rosy petals that carpeted around Tails’ feet were delineated with an odious brown, the last shades of spring starting the process of fading away.

Including Sonic’s once iconic pink colouring that made his quills scintillate like the marbled innards of an oyster shell, no longer enameled and sanctified. As the rest of the roses and forget-me-nots that curled around his head and wrists turned their heads away from the overbearing glare of the sun and wept, Sonic’s body was now shifting to a darker royal violet, back to the familiar gradient of cobalt blue, his former self returning.

The stygian hedgehog just gazed back at the tall mirror, his fingertips sliding the baby blue petals that would fall solemnly on the floor, his muzzle looking as somber as his expression. Tails wasn’t sure if it was a lone sakura that drifted from his eyes, or an actual tear. Even if it wasn’t the latter, Sonic would never tell him anyways. Even his eyes looked less lively as they normally were, his irises an ugly shade of brownish-green. Even within his insides he felt he was slowly rotting

among the rest of his creations, his heart feeling as heavy and sad as the wilting gladiolus that turned itself away from the young, confused fox on the door frame.

"I'm confused, Sonic. I thought *you hated* looking this way...I even told you that this was most likely temporary, and it seems like after that battle you had with Eggman not long ago, you're…"

He sighed. Yes, it was true that not even that long ago he was scared of becoming something he no longer could recognize in reflections and photographs, his mind immediately jumping to the possibility of being this being that was no longer him for the rest of his life, or what would remain for his former self he was all too comfortable with. But things change. Like everyone else, even Sonic was privy to changing and evolving along with the ebbs and flow of time, no matter if those transitions were rough or not. There was even a sense inside him that he wouldn't mind staying like this, if it meant that all the people he cared about in his life were happy with everything he would inevitably do for them. This may have been true for his original blue self as well, but he couldn't help but feel the rest of the world would just become as disappointed and dejected as he was, everything that even his foes would end up loving and finding beautiful in him dying away, simply because time was sometimes cruel.

"I know Tails. I know," he said. It was the only thing he felt he could say to his little brother that made sense to him. If he went even deeper into why he didn't want to accept this, Tails wouldn't understand the logic and complexities of these thoughts.

What if he ends up not loving me anymore? Because he was in love with everything I once was more?

"Even if my calculations weren't correct Sonic, I feel like...that these things never really last forever. Nothing ever does. You even told me that once yourself. If we were always the same person all the time, we'd just end up getting stagnant and...the world wouldn't be as pretty. No one would ever learn or grow from anything. And I think we all learned something from this, even if it didn't last as long as we all thought it would."

Sonic sighed dejectedly again, dragging his feet on the blossomed floor, plummeting onto his mattress with enough force that Tails picked up some slight creaking from the frame, but it sprung his indigo body with apparent concern and support, his brother still looking on. Barely any words were spoken from him, his room filled with only the sounds of finches and orioles from outside. Like the rest of the flowers around and on his body, he closed his lids, his head tilted down. It was as if he didn't want to witness the apparent hideousness of everything around him anymore.

"Everyone told me I was beautiful when I was like this. Now that I'm changing back to what I was, would y'all still love me as much as the first time you guys saw me like this? Sure, I'm the same Sonic you all knew, but I can't help but feel like I'm not as special to y'all anymore. Like I'm sure if Amy, Knuckles, Vanilla and Cream, Rouge…" He paused, his ears swiveling to the sound of the lily's stalks bending and becoming heavier with the weight of his own thoughts regarding Shadow, soon morphing itself briefly to have an appearance resembling more of one of its cousins, a sobbing lily of the valley. "...if all of you guys could truly have it your way, you'd prefer me when I looked all pink and stuff. Not what I'm like right now. Not at all what I once was. Even *I* was starting to like all of this. And once I started loving myself, all this is just being taken away from me. It just ain't fair!"

Tails knew more than most kits his age that life wasn't always the kindest being. He could count all the times he said a very familiar statement to Sonic's before he ended up making him a part of his own makeshift family on more than two tails. He, too, wasn't loved for everything he truly was until his brother showed him it was actually possible, the loneliness and fear that felt much bigger than what his tiny body could manage enshrouding everything that made him beautiful to everyone who now accepted him.

It never felt fair, being torn away from a loving family. It never felt fair, being hated and feared for things beyond your power to control about both your body and mind. But whether Sonic was their

idealized form of him or not, none of it mattered, because Tails wasn't going to allow his own brother to experience that same painful loneliness he felt before he dashed headfirst and gave him life like the many gardens he grew around himself.

Did it matter if he was really pink or blue? Even if they weren't flowers, many things grew around him regardless, including their love for him.

"There's no way that's true, Sonic. Even if you're changing...blue to pink, pink to blue...why would I disregard everything we've been through just because you don't have pretty flowers growing around you anymore? That seems pretty ridiculous for me to do that to you, don't you agree?"

With a blink of his tired, dark forest coloured eyes, he turns his head to face Tails, before watching the ceiling intently, the hedgehog tossing his covers to the side as he could feel himself becoming blanketed by barbed vines, their heads languid with opaque roses that opened their serpentine lips slightly to hiss at the fox. The more he was thinking of his troubles and worries, the roses would grow slightly bigger, before retreating to a shriveled husk, another one soon taking its place. Just to have that one soon decay too. And then another, and then another…

"To tell you the truth little buddy, it ain't you that I'm worried about. It's...someone else. Other people. Yeah. It's just about everyone else, ya know? All those people postin' those pics all over the web. All that. Yeah."

Tails gave a subtle nod. *Ah, I see what this is all about...everyone on social media don't even know it was all Sonic causing all of this abundant plant life around them, or at least really putting two and two together. Some of them are even going on that this was all the work of some forest spirit, named...well, I didn't remember the name, but that's not important right now.*

"Why don't you go visit him then? See what he actually thinks?"

Sonic abruptly rose from his bed of roses, many brown desiccated leaves falling like hideous confetti onto the floor. He kept staring at the mirror, watching as his fur turned from a gray lavender into a deep orchid, his throat feeling constricted by all the thorns that decorated his neck.

“I can’t see Shadow like this, Tails! Cause if I do...I...I…”

The thorns pierced his skin close to his heart, before slinking back into the corners of his bed, dying.

“...if I’m like this when he sees me...everything between us may as well be over…”

“You actually think that?” Tails obviously wasn’t privy to many details about Shadow’s own personal life, or even what his brother and him would talk about and did together. But he knew enough about him that he could still confidently say that Sonic was being as silly as a cuckoo flower, which may as well have been growing on his head.

“Why would you think he’d let you go, just like that? After what happened just a few days ago? You really think he’s...that petty to care?”

“Hey, I never said he was petty…”

“Then why do you think he’d not care about you anymore just because you looked different for about a month?” “*Because* he fell deeper in love with me when I may as well have been *someone else, Tails!* And I ain’t gonna be that *someone* soon anymore! *That’s why!”*

The fox stepped back, tucking his tails inside himself, his paws firmly pressing down on his ears from the knifelike sound of Sonic’s anger, a sound that Tails never wanted to hear, especially against him. Quietly gritting his teeth, he turned away from Sonic, a shooting, searing thought running through his head that he may as well reflect the pain he just felt from within his soul, his fists raised to strike on his own flesh. Before the distressed kit could blink or react, a thick white orchid grew around his shoulder, Sonic gripping his arm gently, but with enough tension and warmth to stop him.

The orchid looked bright white and pretty a little bit longer than most

of the flowers that Sonic was growing, before it would melt and cascade upon itself like the rest of them, being easily brushed off after Tails opened his eyes, his heart still racing, but not as fast as before.

“I’m sorry Tails. I’m…really sorry about that. I just…got frustrated, but none of it was your fault. It was me. It was all me. I’m sorry.”

They heard rough-sounding footsteps barreling through their open door, rougher than usual.

“What the hell is going on here? Sonic? Tails? Are you two seriously alright?”

Knuckles arrived at Sonic’s open door, witnessing both the mess that was now Sonic’s room with all of the dying flowers and singed petals, and the mess that was unfolding between his other brothers. He would’ve actually knocked to be polite if it wasn’t for his concern, and the fact that if he even did so he most likely would’ve bashed the door into multiple pieces, not helping either situation in the end.

“It’s…we’re okay, Knuckles. I messed up. I *really* messed up. That’s all you have to know.”

Tails would direct his sullen look onto Knuckles, then back onto Sonic and the husk of the orchid that lied crumbled onto his wooden floor, then again at Knuckles as he rushed out of his room, a small glimmer in his eyes. Sonic, unfortunately in this case, knew it wasn’t yet another sakura petal drifting from his eyelids.

The echidna watched as Tails, just about as quickly as his brother, vanished outside of his workshop, his namesake spinning to propel him further into the jungle. He could only glance back onto the blue violet-coloured hedgehog, doing something that he thought he almost never did either. He sighed.

“I didn’t really need you to tell me that both you and your room was a

mess. I could clearly see that."

Sonic couldn't even find himself getting angry anymore. The only thing he really wanted to do at this moment was shove Knuckles out of the way and run after him, no longer caring if Tails would even accept his apology. He just didn't want to see him hurt just because of something he carelessly did. It wasn't fair what he did. Tails did nothing but just asked an innocuous question. He did so because he cared about him. Because he told him that no matter what, he was still family to him.

At least, before he lashed out at him unjustly.

"Normally I'd give you a smart aleck response per usual but I ain't doin' that today, Knucks. I gotta find Tails and make sure he's okay. He can stay mad at me. I don't care. I just…"

Small sprouts of hyacinths would slowly emerge from his bone-hardened quills that were feeling more like antlers the more his heart shuttered in his chest, wanting to shut his eyes as his lashes turned into ripped petals of daisies. It wouldn't take long for his growing light blue tufts would only brown and disintegrate into his fur, feeling as sad and discarded as his thoughts. They just no longer seemed to be pretty. Not anymore.

Knuckles' fist lightly tapped on his shoulder. "I'll come with you then."

He knew he didn't at all need to explain why he wanted to. Everyone within Sonic's circle was his family too, when he grew up not having one for almost all of his life.

"I'll call Amy too."

Really? Have Amy witness how much of a screw up I am too?

"Look, we can make sure Tails is home safe together. Amy doesn't need to know about this. She *really* doesn't have to know."

"Yes she does," Knuckles stated flatly. "Amy cares about you and Tails too. Of course she should know. She's our friend."

Sonic knew it was stupid and pointless to argue any further, as every second they were spending on debating if Amy should be their extra set of eyes and feet in finding who may as well be her little brother too was a second not spent searching for Tails. He could only shake his head, fallen dried lily of the valley bulbs scattering from his head as he allowed Knuckles to follow him, his fists somehow managing to send a text to Amy about their predicament.

Well, as long as Shadow doesn't have to see what I'm becoming, then it's fine. I don't care. I just don't care anymore. I can't even care about myself right now. Tails can hate me. He can hate me despite everything he told me, about me still being the same heroic big brother who could do nothing wrong to him. I don't even care anymore. I just want him safe. I just want him okay. I don't want him to get lost and hurt just because of me. Nothing should ever happen to him because of me. I would never forgive myself. I would never forgive myself even if I was pink, black, or blue.

The dark haze of the forest grew tighter and thicker around them, the sky shifting itself to a shade similar to Sonic's fur, most of the purple tints fading away and turning into a much darker blue. He almost regained all sense of his former identity, the one he was soon starting to hate. It had been nearly an hour, and there was still no head or trace of Tails, the hedgehog already fearing the worst. Knuckles remained calm, even trying to ground Sonic back into their reality, not wanting to have to search for yet another missing family member in the Mystic Ruins jungle. It was already stressful enough searching for a bright yellow two-tailed fox in this expansive, densely vegetated land. Even if the needle was a bright obnoxious neon magenta while attempting to look for it in a haystack, it was still becoming a harrowing experience for the both of them.

Their paths would diverge, Knuckles trekking and scouting out the rivers and mountainsides, while Sonic stuck to the familiar overgrowth and eerie stillness further into the jungle depths, knowing it would be easy enough for Knuckles to trace his steps, every

footprint he imprinted on the ground accentuated with a long trail of dried husked stems of the plants he once birthed miraculously. There was nothing about them that indicated to anyone as to what kind of flowers they were. They were only ugly, faceless shells of their former glorious selves.

Even after tripping and sliding on a slick hill still damp from the sudden downpour a few days ago, his body becoming scraped and bruised, bandaged by dried leaves and bristled thorns, Sonic seemed completely impervious and unfeeling to all of his pain, dissociating from everything except for his only mission that mattered to him right now. His throat felt hoarse, yelling his brother's name in the abyss again and again, burning and scarred from the rising thorns from his pained heart. All he wanted to do was scream. Keep screaming into the void of the endless jungle surrounding him. Someone was bound to hear him eventually.

"Tails! *Tails, where are you?* I'm sorry Tails, I really am! You can stay mad at me, that's fine, just don't hurt yourself over this, please!"

It was getting harder for him to pump his legs and pick up yet more speed, the thorns that unraveled around his legs and wrists constricting his movement. Despite the pain, the small wounds and holes that were gathering on his torso, he kept running for him, the pain may as well be nonexistent for him. He felt nothing but the blood rushing through his chest, his heart almost unable to keep up with his body. For the first time in as long as Sonic could remember at this pivotal moment, he felt winded, his lungs struggling to absorb all the oxygen he may as well have given to the world, all the sakura, oak, redwood, and pine trees he inordinately grew. When the world knew that he was a much better person.

It was a peculiar feeling, his body once again feeling tired and worn and not at all like his usual athletic self. He didn't want to stop. He couldn't stop. After all, this was entirely his fault. *His* fault. *Sonic the hedgehog's fault.* He had to resolve this himself, make himself entirely clean and renewed again. But the decaying thorn bushels that ensnared his legs were all becoming too much, the violet hedgehog

stumbling on yet more forest growth before he realized he was nearing a clearing, the same one he found himself in on one of the very first days of his transformation, watching the lotus flowers on the tiny ponds bloom and unfold before the moonlight as the night sky would cry a few slivers of tears onto the earth.

The same emotions the sky must've felt that day were all too mutual to him now, the blossoming petals from his eyes no longer covering his vulnerabilities to the world.

"Sonic! Hey! Over here!"

Sniffling, he brushed them aside, pretending that they were never there in the first place, not wanting Amy to see him like this. He didn't smile or smirk as he normally did, but kept his expression stern, level-faced as he approached her. Or, he originally planned to, if his eyes didn't widen upon seeing who she was with.

"Shadow?"

He resisted every urge inside himself to hide away from his prying, concerned eyes. It was bad enough that Amy was here, seeing him in the ugliest shade of colours they could ever witness from him. Shadow was here too, the one who loved him the most. The one who could clearly see how achromatic and disfigured he was, who could very easily end up hating him the most.

There was still no smile, but neither a flat expression. Why did it matter anymore? The proverbial fox was out of the bag. He may as well just show to the both of them how broken and rotten he really felt inside of him.

"I'm sorry to surprise you like that Sonic, but Knuckles told me what was going on and I wanted to help too, but I'm not fast as you guys. So Shadow offered me a ride on his motorcycle...and he wanted to join us too as...Tails may as well be a part of his family, since you…"

"Rouge would've joined us too, but she was in the middle of a mission," Shadow stated, cutting Amy dryly off. "But she let me borrow a radar of hers, and Tails isn't too far off. She would know,

since she ended up telling me she constantly likes to keep tabs on both of you, for whatever reason."

When Rouge admitted this to him, he wasn't sure how to react. Or when Rouge told him after a night of a few too many glasses of red wine that she sometimes would steal random, insignificant items from Tails' workshop and Sonic's room, such as pens and other things that she believed they wouldn't even notice were gone unless they thought too unnecessarily long about it. It was odd, yes. But if it was one of the little ways that she showed her appreciation and concern for them, then he felt it was for the best he didn't delve into why she did she did too much further.

It at least meant that they could Tails come safely home with them, and that was all that mattered to them, right now.

"Shadow, I'm…" The rose's thorns were only growing from his legs and his wrists and now onto his throat, the navy hedgehog choking on the very words that spilled from his mouth. His tongue could taste the revolting flavour of a few shells and fragments of seeds, spitting them out quietly whenever Shadow and Amy would briefly look away. He was hoping, at the very least, none of them were from datura flowers.

"...I'm sorry too."

Shadow's glance was focused, almost steely, but there didn't seem to be a hint of anger or disdain for him at all. He never liked to sugarcoat things for Sonic to fully understand how he truly felt or the severity of a situation. But even as he answered him, he didn't raise his voice, maintaining fierce eye contact with Sonic's wavering sage coloured eyes.

"The only one who you should apologize to is to Tails when we find him again. There's nothing that you need to be sorry for to me."

"You mean...you're not…"
He coughed out yet more dried husks of seeds, the small sprout that emerged from the cracked shell dying as soon as the air touched it. His lungs heaved, his seemingly frail body quivering as he could feel the last of his former self nearly being vomited out, his indigo tint appearing much more blue and shinier to Shadow's eyes. As painful as it was to cough all these branches, thorns, and seeds from his lungs

and stomach, he couldn't deny that he was starting to feel slightly better every time they would unceremoniously bleed out of him, his heart rate incrementally slowing.

"After Amy told me what Knuckles told her, I had an inkling on how this all started. I already know. You don't need to be sorry."

He faltered back, the bristled stems feeling less intense on his body, their bodies disintegrating into what may as well have been sand as soon as the sun saw them. Shadow looked down, noting his wounds, knowing he would have to brandish his first aid kit for him yet again. He also had to take yet another mental note on how his supply of neon-coloured bandages were running low, and he had to fetch for some more later as this wouldn't be the last time Sonic would receive a few more scrapes and bruises, whether from a serious battle, or just him being his usual self and getting into some minor scuffles from the ground after running all day.

"I know it's common to see you a mess Sonic, but let's hope we don't have to clean up Tails too. Come on, it's getting late. We can discuss this as soon as we find him."

Just as quick as his speed, Sonic dropped the subject entirely, agreeing with his friend's bottom line.

Shortly after, Knuckles regrouped with them, the trail of browning, dejected flowers from Sonic's path helping him easily find them.

"Hey! I looked around the rivers and lakesides and I haven't found him. I even dug out some debris that was still hanging around here since the last time we smashed a few of Eggman's toys and there's no hair or hide of him."

"It's fine," Shadow said. "According to Rouge's radar, he may be only a few yards away from us. He's somewhere within this vicinity."

As they traversed further into the center of the jungle together, there was an ethereal stillness as they walked, the entire woods feeling deafeningly silent. The only sounds that broke through the eerie facade were the distant sounds of kookaburras and chirping insects,

simply ignored by Sonic's rescue party as they blended into the background, searching for any trace of something bright golden yellow, or something that looked like a set of vulpine tails hiding in some overgrowth. The mimosa-coloured sun setting low in the sky, a chiaroscuro of bright reddened shades and tints, Rouge's radar began to rumble in Shadow's leather jacket, a large yellow dot prevalent on the screen.

"He's here."

Shadow tore his scrutinized gaze away from the radar, his eyes being greeted with an uncommon sight. He saw a large, hulking purple figure with a green frog on his head, silently humming to himself nonchalantly as he held a long wooden pole within his grasp, fishing. Right next to him, with a makeshift carved rod of his own, was Tails, looking upon the glassy surface of the pond as the koi once again displayed yet another ballroom show for their unassuming audiences. It was Tails, and while there were evident signs of tears streaking down his muzzled fur, he appeared fine, intensely concentrating on attempting to catch a fish rather than him and his brother's small spat. He looked tired, a little bit emotionally spent, but he was okay.

Sonic's fists trembled, his eyes yet again wet, no longer caring if he didn't have a flower or a fallen petal to hide his emotions. "Tails! You're here! You're okay! Thank Chaos we…"

Shadow placed a paw on his shoulder, reassuring, but firm enough to keep Sonic from hurtling towards him at a breakneck speed, nearly tackling him to the ground. "Slowly, Sonic. He's okay, but try not to startle him. He still needs his personal space."

Sonic nodded, his body no longer rigid and tense, his voice softening as he slowly approached them. Even if Sonic knew that Tails was never a fan of abrupt noises and loud voices, he still had to remind himself to slow everything down, including his own thoughts and actions. It was what very well have triggered this series of events to even begin in the first place, Sonic still finding it sometimes difficult to not get carried away in the torrential stream of his emotions whenever he had to force himself to actually think about his more uncomfortable, uglier thoughts.

Big, oblivious to why many of Sonic's other friends were here, just

simply smiled. “Hello there, Sonic. I found Tails here and just thought he needed to take some time away from his thoughts for a moment.”

“Hey. Long time no see to you too, Big.”

Tails continued to look away from Sonic’s direction, remaining still as he patiently waited for something to bite on his line. He hasn’t caught anything since he began, but he didn’t seem to care.

“Hey little guy,” Sonic whispered, trying to maintain his distance. “I just wanted to say that it’s okay you’re still mad at me, but I just wanted to make sure you were okay.”

Seeing Tails’ bright blue irises nearing the corners of his eyes, attempting to still turn his back on his brother, still hurt, but curious to see that the rest of his friends were here with him, looking towards him with evident sincerity.

“Everyone else is here with me, Tails. We were worried sick about you.”

Tails said nothing, his eyes continuing to focus on the placid pond, the few lotus that floated aimlessly starting to greet the moonlit glare of the sky. He pretended not to notice, even if his carved branch was starting to shake slightly in his grip, his eyes slightly moist.

“We were worried about ya because all of us, and I really do mean all of us, think of you as the part of the family. Our little brother. Especially to me. And we couldn’t live with ourselves if we just allowed something to happen to you like that, because I screwed something up. You can ignore me if you want, but I just wanted to let you know that.”

The kit lost his grip on his carved rod, letting it drop swiftly to the ground. Tears fell down his cheeks again, slowly like scattered magnolia petals. He didn’t say anything, only hugging Sonic close to him, his tails twitching rapidly. Sonic would nuzzle him, brushing away all of his little brother’s tears, his cobalt fur drying and absorbing all the wetness from Tails’ cheeks. Inhaling deeply, Tails noticed Sonic’s fur carried a rosy scent, but he never minded it, as it was oddly calming, taking in as much breathfuls of it inside his small lungs as much as he could.

Big didn't understand at all why all of this was happening, but he still smiled, all the same.

"Froggy is happy to see all of you are good again."

Froggy chirrups and croaks, confirming Big's interpretation.

Sonic's hold on Tails was tight, but careful to not be too tight. As the rest of Tails' family watched from the distance, they would step closer, they too also greeting Big with their very own "long time no see's" and reassuring Tails that they truly didn't want to lose him.

Sonic seemed to have completely forgotten about the colour of his fur, appearing once more as his sleek blue self, the Sonic that everyone knew him as. With every touch Sonic enacted, there was no longer any magic. Flowers no longer grew wherever he lied. The bristled roses that once tried to constrict and bloody his legs seemed to have disintegrate as quickly as they came, every movement the speedy hedgehog would make no longer giving him a sharp pain. It was easier to breathe, the air in the jungle tasting crisp and lively. His heart no longer becoming torn by the thorns of worry and self-doubt, it beat just as strongly as it once did when Sonic's name was christened and he accepted himself to save those in need or those who no longer could.

Even though flowers no longer would sprout on anything he felt, there was always an innate warmth in them, and to Shadow, that was just as magical. He seemed to give life to anything he would touch regardless.

Shadow sent a message to Rouge, letting her know that thanks to her help, Tails was found and safe. She noted that she truly believed that he would be fine in the end. "Tails is a smart kid. I'm sure if anything did happen he would've taken care of it, but I guess all of you knew that. It's more of just letting him know that all of you care about him. And I'm glad I was able to help with that."

Shadow looks back at Sonic, noticing his appearance. He was just as blue as the very first day they met years ago, with Shadow holding up a Chaos Emerald and taunting him. He was now exactly as he

remembered him, laughing and playing along with everyone else that gathered near them. There didn't seem to be any plant life that would rise around him anymore. But that never mattered, Shadow thought. It never mattered, because even without all of the lavenders and gladiolus that decorated his quills, he was still...Sonic. The very same *faker* that would later evolve into his *lover*.

The life that he could see himself living, with not only Sonic himself, but the rest of his so-called extended family...it was funny, that at one point, he thought the brilliantly gleaming emerald would be more precious than what he was given, right now.

It all starts with this. It did. And he wouldn't have it any other way how it was all unraveling before him.

"So, are you going to talk to him now? About how he shouldn't worry about you not loving him anymore just because he turned back to normal?"

Shadow's sanguine eyes would once more meet the reassuring vivid verdant green, the same shade of green that would be reminiscent of the many vibrant hills and plains that Sonic would run on. Bright, without a murky shroud of doubt that seemed to once trouble his heart. As Tails would join with the others, talking and discussing amongst themselves and laughing wholeheartedly, a smile would crevasse his face, just as bright and spry as his eyes always were, even when the transformation would take place.

Shadow smiled back, genially.

"I don't think that'll be necessary. It seems like Sonic ended up grasping the bigger picture of all of this anyways."

"Well, it'd be a shame he can't grow me any more lovely tulips, but sounds like it all worked out."

"You can get tulips anywhere, Rouge."

"Oh, don't act like all wisenheimer with me when I saw how you were when you noticed Blue was growing lavenders around your couch!" Rouge would cackle. "Face it, you'll miss it when he was able to do that! That's almost like any girls' dream!...and maybe yours too."

A brief blush would paint Shadow's normally darkened muzzle, almost

appearing as pink as Sonic's fur at one time, but he would hide it well enough, at least to where he hoped Sonic wouldn't notice it and begin teasing him over it, only causing him to ripen himself further right in front of him. "I never denied that, Rouge. I never did."

Breathing in more of the jungle's sultry air, he continued, trying to retain onto his serious facade.

"But nothing can really last forever. Even the things that give us so much joy. Because if Sonic truly was like this for the rest of his life, would I appreciate it as much as I did back then? Our entire apartment would end up as densely populated as the jungle we're in right now. And I don't think either of us would ever be able to explain to the landlord why that is, or having to cut off long stalks of lavenders and tulips everyday. After a while, that'll grow stale, and we wouldn't even recognize how special and wonderful these things that can just somehow happen to us, wouldn't you agree?"

"It seems like you really adopted his philosophy, hun." Even with the grainy static that was flooding through their conversation due to their being barely a signal in the depths of the jungle, Shadow could still hear her mirthful laugh, as if she was trying to imagine him almost as beet red as the streaks on his devilish-looking quills.

"What? His 'Gotta go fast' mantra?"

"Not that, silly billy. You know the one. That nothing can ever truly last forever. Living your life to the fullest. All that. Even Knuckles would tell me how he started to try to think like him, to not let his life stagnate just because he has to be the guardian of the Master Emerald and all."

"...and have you been talking to Knuckles a lot more recently?"

"Look, you're starting to break up, Shadow." He knew that was a lie, that even though Rouge wanted to sneak in the background of everyone else's lives she was involved in and learn everything she could about them, whether they would be willing to give out this info to her or not, she was never one to allow others to know the details about her own life. Hypocritical? Maybe. Was it always how Rouge was, according to Shadow? Yes, especially when it regarded to those she seemed to like a little bit more than beyond her usual flirty and provocative nature.

“…but I believe Vanilla just contacted me, letting you all know that once you’re done here, she baked a blueberry cobbler for everyone. She even said she would make sure she would save one for me once I get through my mission for today. And I’m sure Cream would be happy to see all of you again. Especially now that she’s starting to see you as a big brother figure lately.”

Shadow could only think to himself that he was hoping one day that Tails would begin to see him in a somewhat similar light the more he and Sonic would spend time together, even if he knew he would never be able to replace Sonic’s bond with him. Though he noticed that Cream was starting to admire him in much the same way, appreciating how gentle he always was with her pet Chao Cheese and spending time with her whenever Vanilla needed some extra assistance, colouring pictures and even having mock tea parties with her, including wearing a gaudy oversized dress that Cream just found in Vanilla’s closet, thinking it suited Shadow more.

They, too, were a part of their family, and Vanilla was just doing what she would normally do even if she wasn’t there with them, appreciating their presence with her baked goods while Cream would play with anyone who was willing to do so, continuing to be inordinately polite at her young age, treating almost everyone around her like dignified gentlemen. He would always be reminded of yet another significant person in his life whenever he was around her, but that was another discussion for another time, he would tell Rouge.

“Stay safe. And let Sonic know.”

“Know what?”

“That I…appreciate him too.”

“I’ll make sure to let Knuckles know that too.”

Shadow could only imagine Rouge’s face visibly puffing up slightly, her cheeks reddened as if she applied her own rouge on her face. The communication between them was abruptly shut off, but he knew she would be fine. It certainly wasn’t the first time, or the last, that they would continue to tease each other over their love lives.

Like the setting sun when they first started their journey for Tails, the darkened sky would scintillate a vast array of shades: a ribbon of sea green serrated through the vast blanket of stars, the constellations still holding their burning white hands onto each other securely, the edges of the world flaring in coral pink, ablaze like an ignited lantern. Everything around them looked so bright, almost immaculate, despite being surrounded by the thick blackened darkness of the jungle, away from the rest of civilization. The lotus flowers that lied calmly on Big's ponds fully blossomed and manifest their lathe, moon-shaped petals to greet the moon that would still hover in the light above them, their leaves brimming with its moonlit grace. The bleeding fairy helmet mushrooms that were left behind by Sonic when he traveled around his world while in his otherworldly state would join in with the earth glowing around Sonic and everyone else involved in his life, along with the moonflowers that Shadow still remembered would guide their path, welcoming them, and the rest of his family, again in appreciating everything that their lives would give them, all the beauty and splendour it all had to offer.

"That's strange," Tails said. "There shouldn't be an *aurora borealis* happening here."

"An aurora what now?" Sonic would cut off his own questions to Tails, distracted by both Shadow approaching him and the emerald to a near amethyst to a rose quartz glaze the world above them would take on, his eyes unable to look away from everything around him becoming more alive, even without his apparently venerable visage mere moments ago.

"The Northern Lights," Shadow stated, his eyes completely affixed to the phantasms of the night as well. "They're caused by solar storms near the Earth's atmosphere, sometimes because of excess energy from charged particles."

Tails couldn't help but be impressed by Shadow's knowledge, most likely due to him living most of his remembered life aboard the space colony ARK, watching the sun and stars dance with the eternally twirling Earth in their united ballet. "But why would that be happening, right here, right now? I've heard absolutely nothing about this possibly occurring tonight! If scientists knew, they would've reported it and it would've been all over my timeline!"

"Hmm." Shadow hummed softly, knowing it didn't at all add up to

him either. “Only explanation I can think of is maybe...when Sonic transformed, it somehow sent some of those particles up in the atmosphere and produced enough solar winds where it’s just...somehow happening within our general vicinity.”

The young fox’s tails would undulate and tap the earth quickly, gazing up at Shadow with curiosity. “Do you...really think Sonic’s excess energy caused by his sudden transformation actually...made this happen, right before our very eyes?”

“Does it really matter how it happened?” Sonic asked. “Sometimes...ya just gotta save all the questions and the big thinkin’ at a later date and just enjoy everything that’s unfoldin’ before us, little bud. Just gotta worry about the right here, right now, and welcome everything the present’s givin’ us. After all, if you’re not living in the present, then are you truly living for moments like these?”

Shadow would only reply with silence and a nod, acknowledging that whether his theory was truly correct or not, Sonic was the one who was ultimately right.

Big smiled again, Froggy perched atop his head, croaking along with the crickets that provided a much needed enchanting ambiance to the incandescent display they were seeing above them.

“*Pretty lights…”*

“That’s right, Big,” Sonic said. “They really are pretty, aren’t they?”

It may have been a trick of the same *pretty lights* that entranced Big, but Shadow swore as he glanced at Sonic briefly, he could see a lone white rose rising from Sonic’s quills, its luminescent petals radiating through the ruptured cracks of the night, accentuated beautifully by the tender pink glow of the sky.

“Hey, Shadow, are ya alright? If I didn’t know any better, I’d be askin’ if you were falling in love with me all over again from how much you’ve been lookin’ at me.”

A resplendent blush would emerge on Shadow’s face, but despite his obvious embarrassment, he said nothing, and continued to look on, trying to convince himself that what he was truly seeing and witnessing was real and true.

But he knew that Sonic again, was right. He was.

Holding his hand, Shadow thought it very well could’ve been his imagination once again, but he felt there were emerging moon-kissed petals of that very same rose in their fingertips, somehow thriving and standing tall in between the cracks of their warm paws.

Chapter End Notes

> It's 4 am where I am when I finished this. I will be taking a small break from fic writing at the moment but will be back to work on another fic I'm currently in the process of writing. In the meantime, I will imagine a pink Sonic growing me some lovely weed and I'm going to get stoned after completing my month-long tolerance break! YIPPIE
>
> See ya'll around. And remember one of Sonic's most iconic sayings: *"Live fast, smoke grass, and eat ass."*

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